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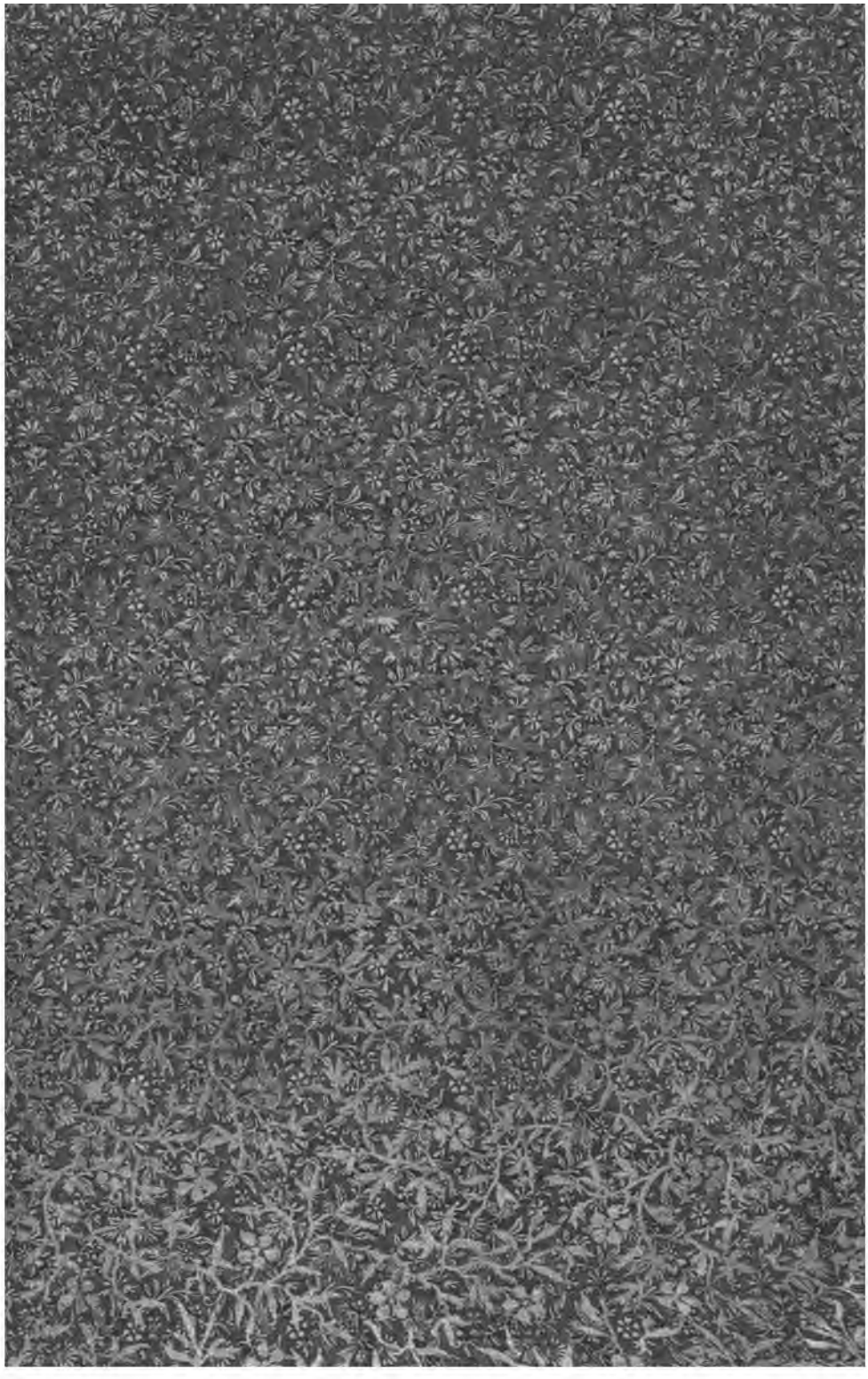

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FROM AN ORIGINAL DRAWING BY H. A. HART

"Her feet are rooted to the spot, for lo! she sees two powerful hounds."

(See Page [illegible] of "Des Vers.")

SUR L'EAU

OR

ON THE FACE OF THE WATERS

BY

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

VOL. XIII

ST. DUNSTAN SOCIETY
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUR L'EAU

		PAGE
I.	"THE ANCHOR'S WEIGHED"	1
II.	CANNES	15
III.	AGAY	41
IV.	SAINT-RAPHAËL	72
V.	SAINT-TROPEZ	82
VI.	THE CHARTREUSE DE LA VERNE	106
VII.	MONTE CARLO	116

DES VERS

THE WALL	1
A SUNSTROKE	9
HORROR	11
A CONQUEST	13
A SNOWY NIGHT	20
A MESSAGE OF LOVE	22
AT THE WATER'S SIDE	24
THE WILD GEESE	35
THE GRANDFATHER	37
DISCOVERY	39
THE BIRDCATCHER	41

PAGE

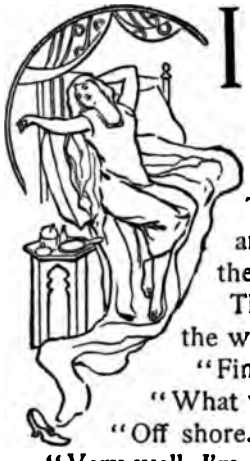
LONGINGS 43
THE LAST ESCAPADE 45
SONG OF THE MOONLIGHT 61
A WALK AT SIXTEEN 64
A PROTEST 66
LOVE'S ENDING 69
A STREET CHAT 75
A RUSTIC VENUS 80
TO A CHILD 111
ON THE DEATH OF LOUIS BOUILHET 112
SOUVENANCE 114

A TALE OF OLD TIMES 1–22
A FAMILY AFFAIR 1–41

SUR L'EAU

I.

"THE ANCHOR'S WEIGHED."



I WAS sound asleep when my skipper Bernard awoke me by throwing up sand at my window. I opened it, and on my face, on my chest, in my very soul, I felt the cold delicious breath of the night. The sky was a clear blue gray, and alive with the quivering fire of the stars.

The sailor, standing at the foot of the wall, said:

"Fine weather, sir."

"What wind?"

"Off shore."

"Very well, I'm coming."

Half an hour later I was hurrying down to the shore. The horizon was pale with the first rays of dawn, and I saw in the distance behind the Baie des Anges the lights at Nice, and still further on the revolving lighthouse at Villefranche.

In front of me Antibes was dimly visible through the lifting darkness, with its two towers rising above

the cone-shaped town, surrounded by the old walls built by Vauban.

In the streets were a few dogs and a few men, workmen starting off to their daily labor. In the port, nothing but the gentle swaying of the boats at the side of the quay and the soft plashing of the scarcely moving water could be heard; or at times the sound of the straining of a cable or of a boat grazing against the hull of a vessel. The boats, the flagstones, the sea itself seemed asleep under the gold-spangled firmament, and under the eye of a small lighthouse which, standing out at the end of the jetty, kept watch over its little harbor.

Beyond, in front of Ardouin's building yard, I saw a glimmer, I felt a stir, I heard voices. They were expecting me. The "Bel-Ami" was ready to start.

I went down into the cabin, lighted up by a couple of candles hanging and balanced like compasses, at the foot of the sofas, which at night were used as beds; then I donned a leathern sailor's jacket, put on a warm cap, and returned on deck. Already the hawsers had been cast off, and the two men, hauling in the cable, had brought the anchor apeak. Then they hoisted the big sail, which went up slowly to the monotonous groan of blocks and rigging. It rose wide and wan in the darkness of the night, quivering in the breath of the wind, hiding from us both sky and stars.

The breeze was coming dry and cold from the invisible mountain that one felt to be still laden with snow. It came very faint, as though hardly awake, undecided and intermittent.

Then the men shipped the anchor, I seized the helm, and the boat, like a big ghost, glided through the still waters. In order to get out of the port, we had to tack between the sleeping luggers and schooners. We went gently from one quay to another, dragging after us our little round dingy, which followed us as a cygnet, just hatched from its shell, follows the parent swan.

As soon as we reached the channel between the jetty and the square fort the yacht became livelier, quickened its pace, and seemed more alert, as though a joyous feeling had taken possession of her. She danced over the countless short waves,—moving furrows of a boundless plain. Quitting the dead waters of the harbor, she now felt under her the living sea.

There was no swell, and I directed our course between the walls of the town and the buoy called *Cinq-cents francs* (Twenty pounds sterling) that marks the deeper channel; then, catching the breeze astern, I made sail to double the headland.

The day was breaking, the stars were disappearing, for the last time the Villefranche lighthouse closed its revolving eye, and I saw strange roseate glimmers in the distant sky, above the still invisible Nice; the heights of the Alpine glaciers lighted up by the early dawn. I gave the helm over to Bernard, and watched the rising sun. The freshened breeze sent us skimming over the quivering violet-tinted waters. A bell clanged, throwing to the wind the three rapid strokes of the Angelus. How is it that the sound of bells seems livelier in the early dawn, and heavier at nightfall? I like that chill and keen hour of morn, when man still sleeps, and all nature

is awakening. The air is full of mysterious thrills unknown to belated risers. I inhale, I drink it; I see all life returning, the material life of the world; the life that runs through all the planets, the secret of which is our eternal puzzle.

Raymond said: "We shall soon have the wind from the east."

Bernard replied: "More likely from the west."

The skipper Bernard is lean and lithe, remarkably clean, careful, and prudent. Bearded up to his eyes, he has a frank look and a kindly voice. He is devoted and trusty. But everything makes him anxious at sea; a sudden swell that foretells a breeze out at sea, a long cloud over the Esterel mountains announcing a mistral to westward, even a rising barometer, for that may indicate a squall from the east. Moreover, a capital sailor, he exercises a constant supervision and carries cleanliness to such an extent as to rub up the brasses the moment a drop of water has touched them.

His brother-in-law, Raymond, is a strong fellow, swarthy and mustached, indefatigable and bold, as loyal and devoted as the other, but less variable and nervous, more calm, more resigned to the surprises and treachery of the sea. Bernard, Raymond, and the barometer are sometimes in contradiction with each other, and perform an amusing comedy with three personages, of which one, the best informed, is dumb.

"Dash it, sir, we're sailing well," said Bernard.

We had, it was true, passed through the Gulf of La Salis, cleared La Garoupe, and were approaching Cape Gros, a flat low rock stretching out on a level with the water.

Now, the whole Alpine mountain range appeared, a monster wave threatening the sea, a granite wave capped with snow, where each pointed tip looks like a dash of spray motionless and frozen. And the sun rises behind this ice, shedding over it the light of its molten silver rays.

Then directly after, as we round the Antibes headland, we discover the Lerins Isles, and further off behind them, the tortuous outline of the Esterel. The Esterel is the stage scenery of Cannes, a lovely keepsake kind of mountain of faintest blue, elegantly outlined in a coquettish and yet artistic style, washed in water-colors on a theatrical sky by a good-natured Creator for the express purpose of serving as model for English lady landscape painters, and as a subject of admiration for consumptive or idle royal highnesses.

With each hour of the day, the Esterel changes its aspect, and charms the gaze of the *upper ten.*

In the morning the chain of mountains, correctly and clearly cut out, is sharply delineated on a blue sky: a tender and pure blue, the ideal blue of a southern shore. But in the evening the wooded sides of the slopes darken and become a black patch on a fiery sky, on a sky incredibly red and dramatic. Never have I seen elsewhere such fairy-like sunsets, such conflagrations of the whole horizon, such an effulgence of clouds, such a clever and superb arrangement, such a daily renewal of extravagant and magnificent effects which call forth admiration but would raise a smile were they painted by men.

The Lerins Isles, which to the east close the Gulf of Cannes and separate it from the Gulf of Juan, look themselves like two operatic islands placed there for

the satisfaction and delight of the invalid and winter sojourners.

Seen from the open sea, where we now are, they resemble two dark green gardens growing in the water. Out at sea, at the extreme end of Saint-Honorat, stands a romantic ruin, its walls rising out of the waves, quite one of Walter Scott's castles, ever beaten by the surf, and in which, in former days, the monks defended themselves against the Saracens; for Saint-Honorat always belonged to monks, except during the Revolution. At that period the island was purchased by an actress of the Comédie-Française.

Stronghold, militant monks, now toned down into the fattest of smilingly begging Trappists; pretty actress come thither no doubt to conceal her love affairs in the dense thickets and pines of this rock-belted islet; all, down to the very names, "Lerins, Saint-Honorat, Sainte-Marguerite," fit for Florian's fables, all is pleasing, coquettish, romantic, poetic, and rather insipid on the delightful shores of Cannes.

To correspond with the antique manor embattled, slender, and erect, which looks toward the open sea at the extremity of Saint-Honorat, Sainte-Marguerite is terminated on the land side by the celebrated fortress in which the Man in the Iron Mask and Bazaine were confined. A channel about a mile long stretches out between the headland of the Croisette and the fortress, which has the aspect of an old squat house, devoid of anything imposing or majestic. It seems to crouch down dull and sly, a real trap for prisoners.

I can now see the three gulfs. In front, beyond the islands, lies that of Cannes; nearer, the Gulf of Juan, and, behind, the Baie des Anges, overtopped by the

Alps and the snowy heights. Further off, the coasts can be seen far beyond the Italian frontier, and with my glasses I can sight at the end of a promontory the white houses of Bordighera.

And everywhere, all along the endless coast, the towns by the seashore, the villages perched up on high on the mountain side, the innumerable villas dotted about in the greenery, all look like white eggs laid on the sands, laid on the rocks, laid among the pine forests by gigantic birds that have come in the night from the snowlands far above.

Villas again on the Cape of Antibes, a long tongue of land, a wonderful garden thrown out between the seas, blooming with the most lovely flowers of Europe, and at the extreme point, Eileen Rock, a charming and whimsical residence that attracts visitors from Cannes and Nice.

The breeze has dropped, the yacht hardly makes any progress. After the current of land wind that lasts all night we are waiting and hoping for a whiff of sea air, which will be most welcome, wherever it may blow from.

Bernard still believes in a west wind, Raymond in an east one, and the barometer remains motionless at a little above 76.

The sun now radiant, overspreads the earth, making the walls of the houses sparkle from afar like scattered snow, and sheds over the sea a light varnish of luminous blue.

Little by little, taking advantage of the faintest breath, of those caresses of the air which one can hardly feel on the skin, but which nevertheless make lively and well-trimmed yachts glide through still

waters, we sail beyond the last point of the headland, and the whole Gulf of Juan, with the squadron in the center of it, lies before us.

From afar, the ironclads look like rocks, islets, and reefs covered with dead trees. The smoke of a train runs along the shore between Cannes and Juan-les-Pins, which will perhaps become later on the prettiest place on the whole coast.

Three fishing-boats with their lateen sails, one red and the other two white, are detained in the channel between Sainte-Marguerite and the mainland.

All is still, the soft and warm calm of a morning's springtide in the south; and already it seems to me as if I had left weeks ago, months ago, years ago, the talking, busy world; I feel arise within me the intoxication of solitude, the sweet delights of a rest that nothing will disturb, neither the white letter, nor the blue telegram, nor the bell at my door, nor the bark of my dog. I cannot be sent for, invited, carried off, overwhelmed by sweet smiles, or harassed by civilities. I am alone, really alone, really free. The smoke of the train runs along the seaside; while I float in a winged home that is rocked and cradled; pretty as a bird, tiny as a nest, softer than a hammock, wandering over the waters at the caprice of the wind, independent and free! To attend to me and sail my boat, I have two sailors at my call, and books and provisions for a fortnight.

A whole fortnight without speaking, what joy! Overcome by the heat of the sun I closed my eyes, enjoying the deep repose of the sea, when Bernard said in an undertone:

"The brig over there has a good breeze."

Over there it was true, far away in front of Agay, a brig was advancing toward us; I could distinctly see with my glasses her rounded sails puffed out by the wind.

"Pooh, it's the breeze from Agay," answered Raymond, "it is calm round Cape Roux."

"Talk away, we shall have a west wind," replied Bernard.

I leaned over to look at the barometer in the saloon. It had fallen during the last half hour. I told Bernard, who smiled and whispered:

"It feels like a westerly wind, sir."

And now my curiosity awakens; the curiosity special to all those who wander over the sea, which makes them see everything, notice everything, and take an interest in the smallest detail. My glasses no longer leave my eyes; I look at the color of the water on the horizon. It remains clear, varnished, unruffled. If there is a breeze, it is still far off.

What a personage the wind is for the sailors! They speak of it as of a man, an all-powerful sovereign, sometimes terrible and sometimes kindly. It is the main topic of conversation all the day through, and it is the subject of one's incessant thoughts throughout the days and nights. You land folk know it not! As for us, we know it better than our father or our mother, the invisible, the terrible, the capricious, the sly, the treacherous, the devouring tyrant. We love it and we dread it; we know its maliciousness and its anger, which the warnings in the heavens or in the depths slowly teach us to anticipate. It forces us to think of it at every minute, at every second, for the struggle between it and us is indeed

ceaseless. All our being is on the alert for the battle; our eye to detect undiscernible appearances; our skin to feel its caress or its blow, our spirit to recognize its mood, foresee its caprices, judge whether it is calm or wayward. No enemy, no woman gives us so powerful a sensation of struggle, nor compels us to so much foresight, for it is the master of the sea, it is that thing which we may avoid, make use of, or fly from, but which we can never subdue. And there reigns in the soul of a sailor, as in that of a believer, the idea of an irascible and formidable God, the mysterious, religious, infinite fear of the wind, and respect for its power.

"Here it comes, sir," Bernard said to me.

Far away, very far away, at the end of the horizon, a blue-black line lengthens out on the water. It is nothing, a shade, an imperceptible shadow; it is the wind. Now we await it motionless, under the heat of the sun.

I look at the time, eight o'clock, and I say:

"Bless me, it is early for the westerly wind."

"It will blow hard in the afternoon," replied Bernard.

I raised my eyes to the sail, hanging flat, loose, and inert. Its great triangle seemed to reach up to the sky, for we had hoisted on the foremast the great fine-weather gaff topsail and its yard overtopped the masthead by quite two yards. All is motionless, we might be on land. The barometer is still falling. However, the dark line perceived afar, approaches. The metallic luster of the waters is suddenly dimmed and transformed into a slaty shade. The sky is pure and cloudless.

Suddenly, around us the polished surface of the sea is rippled by imperceptible shivers gliding rapidly over it, appearing but to be effaced, as though it were riddled by a rain of thousands of little pinches of sand.

The sail quivers slightly, and presently the main boom slowly lurches over to starboard. A light breath now caresses my face, and the shivers on the water increase around us, as though the rain of sand had become continuous. The cutter begins to move forward. She glides on upright, and a slight plash makes itself heard along her sides. I feel the tiller stiffen in my hand, that long brass crossbar which looks in the sun like a fiery stem, and the breeze steadily increases. We shall have to tack, but what matter; the boat sails close to the wind, and if the breeze holds, we shall be able to beat up to Saint-Raphaël before the sun goes down.

We now approach the squadron, whose six ironclads and two dispatch boats turn slowly at their anchors, with their bows to the west. Then we tack toward the open sea to pass the Formigues rocks, which are marked by a tower in the middle of the gulf. The breeze freshens more and more with surprising rapidity, and the waves rise up short and choppy. The yacht heels under her full set of sails and runs on, followed by the dingy, which with stretched-out painter is hurried through the foam, her nose in the air and stern in the water.

On nearing the island of Saint-Honorat we pass by a naked rock, red and bristling like a porcupine, so rugged, so armed with teeth, points, and claws as to be well-nigh impossible of access; and one

must advance with precaution, placing one's feet in the hollows between the tusks: it is called Saint-Ferréol.

A little earth, come from no one knows where, has accumulated in the holes and crevasses of the rock, and lilies grow in it, and beautiful blue irises, from seeds which seem to have fallen from heaven.

It is on this strange reef, in the open sea, that for five years lay buried and unknown the body of Paganini. The adventure is worthy of this artist, whose queer character, at once genial and weird, gave him the reputation of being possessed by the devil, and who, with his odd appearance in body and face, his marvelous talent and excessive emaciation, has become an almost legendary being, a sort of Hoffmanesque phantasm.

As he was on his way home to Genoa, his native town, accompanied by his son, who alone could hear him now, so weak had his voice become, he died at Nice of cholera, on the twenty-seventh of May, 1840.

The son at once took the body of his father on board a ship and set sail for Italy. But the Genoese clergy refused to give burial to the demoniac. The court of Rome was consulted, but dared not grant the authorization. The body was, however, about to be disembarked, when the municipality made opposition, under the pretext that the artist had died of cholera. Genoa was at that time ravaged by an epidemic of this disease, and it was argued that the presence of this new corpse might possibly aggravate the evil.

Paganini's son then returned to Marseilles, where entrance to the port was refused him for the same

reasons. He then went on to Cannes, where he could not land either.

He therefore remained at sea, and the waves rocked the corpse of the fantastic artist, everywhere repelled by men. He no longer knew what to do, where to go, on which spot to lay the dead body so sacred to him, when he espied the naked rock of Saint-Ferréol in the midst of the billows. There at last he landed the coffin, and buried it in the center of the islet.

It was only in 1845 that he went back with two of his friends to take up the remains of his father, and transfer them to Genoa to the Villa Gajona.

Would one not have preferred that the extraordinary violinist should have remained at rest upon the bristling reef, cradled by the song of the waves as they break on the torn and craggy rock?

Further on, in the open sea, rises the castle of Saint-Honorat, which we had already perceived as we rounded the Cape of Antibes, and further on still, a line of reefs ended by a tower called Les Moines.

They are now quite white with surf and echoing with the roar of the breakers.

They form one of the most dangerous perils of the coast during the night, for they are marked by no light, and they are the cause of frequent wrecks.

A sudden gust heels us over, so that the water washes the deck, and I give orders for the gaff topsail to be lowered, the cutter being no longer able to carry it without endangering the safety of the mast.

The waves sink, swell, and whiten; the wind whistles, ill tempered and squally,—a threatening wind, which cries "Take care!"

"We shall have to sleep at Cannes," said Bernard.

And in fact, at the end of half an hour, we had to lower the standing jib. and replace it by a smaller one, taking a reef in the sail at the same time; then a quarter of an hour later we had to take in a second reef. Thereupon I decided to make for the harbor at Cannes, a dangerous harbor, without shelter; a roadstead open to the southwesterly sea, where the ships are in constant danger. When one thinks what a considerable amount of wealth would accrue to the town by the large number of foreign yachts that would flock there, were they certain of finding a proper shelter, one understands how inveterate must be the indolence of this southern population, who have not yet been able to obtain from government such indispensable works. At ten o'clock we dropped anchor opposite the steamboat "Le Cannois," and I landed, thoroughly disappointed at the interruption of my trip. The whole roadstead was white with foam.

II.

Cannes

Princes, Princes, everywhere Princes. They who love Princes are indeed happy.

No sooner had I set foot yesterday morning on the promenade of the Croisette than I met three, one behind the other. In our democratic country, Cannes has become the city of titles.

If one could open minds in the same manner as one lifts the cover off a saucepan, one would find figures in the brain of the mathematician; outlines of actors gesticulating and declaiming in a theatrical author's head; the form of a woman in that of a lover's; licentious pictures in that of a rake; verses in the brain of a poet; and in the cranium of the folk who come to Cannes there would be found coronets of every description, floating about like vermicelli in soup.

Some men gather together in gambling houses because they are fond of cards, others meet on race-

courses because they are fond of horses. People gather together at Cannes because they love Imperial and Royal Highnesses.

There they are at home and, in default of the kingdoms of which they have been dispossessed, reign peacefully in the salons of the faithful.

Great and small, poor and rich, sad and gay, all are to be found, according to taste. In general they are modest, strive to please, and show in their intercourse with humbler mortals, a delicacy and affability that is hardly ever found in our own *députés,* those Princes of the ballot.

However, if the Princes, the poor wandering Princes without subjects or civil list, who come to live in homely fashion in this town of flowers and elegance, affect simplicity, and do not lay themselves open to ridicule, even from those most disrespectfully inclined, such is not the case with regard to the worshipers of Highnesses.

These latter circle round their idols with an eagerness at once religious and comical; and directly they are deprived of one, they fly off in quest of another, as though their mouths could only open to say "Monseigneur" or "Madame," and speak in the third person.

They cannot be with you five minutes without telling you what the Princess replied, what the Grand Duke said; the promenade planned with the one, the witty saying of the other. One feels, one sees, one guesses that they frequent no other society but that of persons of Royal blood, and if they deign to speak to you, it is in order to inform you exactly of what takes place on these heights.

What relentless struggles, struggles in which every possible ruse is employed in order to have at one's table, at least once during the season, a Prince, a real Prince, one of those at a premium. What respect one inspires when one has met a Grand Duke at lawn tennis, or when one has merely been presented to Wales—as the mashers say.

To write down one's name at the door of these "exiles," as Daudet calls them, of these tumble-down Princes, as others would say, creates a constant, delicate, absorbing, and engrossing occupation. The visitor's book lies open in the hall between a couple of lackeys, one of whom proffers a pen. One inscribes one's name at the tag end of some two thousand names of every sort and description, among which titles swarm and the noble particle *de* abounds! After which, one goes off with the haughty air of a man just ennobled, as happy as one who has accomplished a sacred duty, and one proudly says to the first person met: "I have just written down my name at the Grand Duke of Gerolstein's!" Then in the evening at dinner one says, in an important tone: "I noticed just now, on the Grand Duke of Gerolstein's list, the names of X——, Y——, and Z——." And everyone is interested and listens as if the event were of the greatest importance.

But why laugh and be astonished at the harmless and innocent mania of the elegant admirers of Princes, when we meet in Paris fifty different races of hero-worshipers who are in no wise less amusing?

Whoever has a salon must needs have some celebrities to show there, and a hunt is organized in order to secure them. There is hardly a woman in

society and of the best, who is not anxious to have her artist or her artists; and she will give dinners for them in order that the whole world may know that hers is a clever set.

Between affecting to possess the wit one has not, but which one summons with a flourish of trumpets, or affecting Princely intimacies—where is the difference?

Among the great men most sought after by women, old and young, are most assuredly musicians. Some houses possess a complete collection of them. Moreover, these artists possess the inestimable advantage of being useful in the evening parties. However, people who desire a superlative *rara avis,* can hardly hope to bring two together in the same room. We may add that there is not a meanness of which any woman, a leader of society, is not capable, in order to embellish her salon with a celebrated composer. The delicate attentions usually employed to secure a painter or only a literary man, become quite inadequate when the subject is a tradesman of sounds. For him allurements and praise hitherto unknown are employed. His hands are kissed like those of a King, he is worshiped as a God, when he has deigned to execute his "Regina Cœli." A hair of his beard is worn in a ring; a button fallen from his breeches one evening in a violent movement of his arm, during the execution of the grand *finale* of his "Doux Repos" becomes a medal, a sacred medal worn in the bosom hanging from a golden chain.

Painters are of less value, although still rather sought after. They are not so divine and more Bohemian. Their manners are less courteous and above

all not sufficiently sublime. They often replace inspiration by broad jests and silly puns. They carry with them too much of the perfume of the studio, and those who by dint of watchfulness have managed to get rid of it only exchange one odor for another, that of affectation. And then they are a fickle, light, and bragging set. No one is certain of keeping them long, whereas the musician builds his nest in the family circle.

Of late years, the literary man has been sought after. He presents many great advantages: he talks, he talks lengthily, he talks a great deal, his conversation suits every kind of public, and as his profession is to be intelligent, he can be listened to and admired in all security.

The woman who is possessed with the mania for having at her house a literary man, just as one would have a parrot whose chatter should attract all the neighboring *concierges,* has to take her choice between poets and novelists. There is more of the ideal about the poet, more spontaneity about the novelist. The poets are more sentimental, the novelists more positive. It is a matter of taste and constitution. The poet has more charm, the novelist has often more wit. But the novelist presents dangers that are not met with in the poet: he pries, pillages, and makes capital of all he sees. With him there is no tranquillity, no certainty that he will not, some day, lay you bare in the pages of a book. His eye is like a pump that sucks up everything, like the hand of a thief that is always at work. Nothing escapes him; he gathers and picks up ceaselessly; he notices the movements, the gestures, the intentions,

the slightest incidents and events; he picks up the smallest words, the smallest actions, the smallest thing. He makes stock from morning till night of these observations out of which he will make a good telling story, a story that will make the round of the world, which will be read, discussed, commented upon by thousands and thousands of people. And the most terrible part of all is that the wretch cannot help drawing striking portraits, in spite of himself, unconsciously, because he sees things as they are, and he must relate what he sees. Notwithstanding the cunning he uses in disguising his personages, it will be said: "Did you recognize Mr. X—— and Mrs. Y——? They are striking resemblances."

It is assuredly as dangerous for people in good society to invite and make much of novelists, as it would be for a miller to breed rats in his mill. And yet they are held in great favor.

When, therefore, a woman has fixed her choice on the writer she intends to adopt, she lays siege to him by means of every variety of compliments, attractions, and indulgence. Like water which, drop by drop, slowly wears away the hardest rock, the fulsome praise falls at each word on the impressionable heart of the literary man. Then, when she sees that he is moved, touched, and won by the constant flattery, she isolates him, severing, little by little, the ties he may have elsewhere, and imperceptibly accustoms him to come to her house, make himself happy, and there enshrine his thoughts. In order the more thoroughly to acclimatize him in her house, she paves the way for his success, brings him forward, sets him in relief, and displays for him, before all the old

habitués of the household, marked consideration and boundless admiration.

At last, realizing that he is now an idol, he remains in the temple. He finds, moreover, that the position affords him every advantage, for all the other women lavish their most delicate favors upon him to entice him away from his conqueror. If, however, he is clever, he will not hearken to the entreaties and coquetries with which he is overwhelmed. And the more faithful he appears, the more he will be sought after, implored, and loved. Ah! let him beware of allowing these drawing-room sirens to entice him away; he will immediately lose two-thirds of his value, if he once becomes public property.

Soon he forms a literary circle, a church of which he is the deity, the only deity, for true faiths never have more than one God. People will flock to the house to see him, to hear him, to admire him, as one comes from afar to visit certain shrines. He will be envied! She will be envied! They will converse upon literature as priests talk of dogmas, scientifically and solemnly; they will be listened to, both the one and the other, and on leaving this literary salon, one will feel as though one were quitting a cathedral.

Other men are also sought after, but in a lesser degree; for instance, generals, who, neglected by society and not held in much greater consideration than *députés,* are yet in demand among the middle classes. The *député* is only in request at moments of crisis. He is kept on hand, by a dinner now and then during a parliamentary lull. The scholar has also his partisans—every variety of taste exists in nature; and a clerk in office is himself highly esteemed by

I call to mind Mentone, the warmest, and healthiest of these winter residences. Even as in warlike cities, the fortresses can be seen standing out on the surrounding heights, so in this region of moribunds, the cemetery is visible on the summit of a hill.

What a spot it would be for the living, that garden where the dead lie asleep! Roses, roses, everywhere roses. They are blood-red or pale, or white, or streaked with veins of scarlet. The tombs, the paths, the places still unoccupied and which to-morrow will be filled, all are covered with them. Their strong perfume brings giddiness, making both head and legs falter.

And all those who lie there, were but sixteen, eighteen, or twenty years of age.

One wanders on from tomb to tomb, reading the names of those youthful victims, killed by the implacable disease. 'Tis a children's cemetery, a cemetery similar to the young girls' balls, where no married couples are admitted.

From the cemetery the view extends to the left in the direction of Italy as far as the Bordighera headland, where the white houses stretch out into the sea; and to the right as far as Cape Martin, which dips its leafy coast in the water.

Nevertheless, all around, all along these delightful shores, we are in the home of Death. But it is discreet, veiled, full of tact and bashfulness, well bred in fact. Never does one meet it face to face, although at every moment it passes near.

It might even be thought that no one dies in this country, so thorough is the complicity of deceit in which this sovereign revels. But how it is felt, how

it is detected; how often a glimpse is caught of its black robes! Truly all the roses and the orange blossoms are requisite to prevent the breeze being laden with the dread smell which is exhaled from the chamber of death.

Never is a coffin seen in the streets, never any funeral trappings, never is a death-knell heard. Yesterday's emaciated pedestrian no longer passes beneath your window, and that is all. If you are astonished at no longer seeing him, and inquire after him, the landlord and servants tell you with a smile, that he had got better and by the doctor's advice had left for Italy. In each hotel Death has its secret stairs, its confidants, and its accomplices. A philosopher of olden times would have said many fine things upon the contrast of the elegance and misery which here elbow one another.

It is twelve o'clock, the promenade is now deserted, and I return on board the "Bel-Ami," where awaits me an unpretending breakfast prepared by Raymond, whom I find dressed up in a white apron, frying potatoes.

All the remainder of the day I read.

The wind was still violently blowing, and the yacht danced between her anchors, for we had been obliged to let go the starboard one also. The motion ended by benumbing me, and I fell into a long doze. When Bernard came into the cabin to light the candles it was seven o'clock, and as the surf along the quay made landing difficult, I dined on my boat.

After dinner I went up and sat in the open air. Around me Cannes stretched forth her many lights. Nothing can be prettier than a town lighted up and

seen from the sea. On the left, the old quarter with its houses that seemed to climb one upon the other, mingled its lights with that of the stars; on the right, the gas lamps of the Croisette extended like an enormous serpent a mile and a half long.

And I reflected that in all the villas, in all the hotels, people were gathered together this evening, as they were last night, as they will be to-morrow, and that they are talking. Talking! about what? The Princes! the weather! And then?—the weather!—the Princes!—and then—about nothing!

Can anything be more dreary than *table d'hôte* conversation? I have lived in hotels, I have endured the emptiness of the human soul as it is there laid bare. In truth, one must be hedged in by the most determined indifference not to weep with grief, disgust, and shame, when one hears men talk. Man, the ordinary man, rich, known, esteemed, respected, held in consideration, is satisfied with himself, and he knows nothing, he understands nothing, yet he talks of intelligence as though he knew all about it.

How blinded and intoxicated we must be by our foolish pride to fancy ourselves anything more than animals slightly superior to other animals. Listen to them, the fools, seated round the table! They are talking! Talking with gentle confiding ingenuousness, and they imagine that they are exchanging ideas! What ideas? They say where they have been walking: "It was a very pretty walk, but rather cold coming home"; "The cooking is not bad in the hotel, although hotel food is always rather spicy." And they relate what they have done, what they like, what they believe.

I fancy I behold the deformity of their souls as a monstrous fœtus in a jar of spirits of wine. I assist at the slow birth of the commonplace sayings they constantly repeat; I watch the words as they drop from the granary of stupidity into their imbecile mouths, and from their mouths into the inert atmosphere which bears them to my ears.

But their ideas, their noblest, most solemn, most respected ideas, are they not the unimpeachable proof of the omnipotence of stupidity,—eternal, universal, indestructible stupidity?

All their conceptions of God, an awkward deity, whose first creations are such failures that He must needs recreate them, a deity who listens to our secrets and notes them down, a God who, in turn, policeman, Jesuit, lawyer, gardener, is conceived now in cuirass, now in robes, now in wooden shoes; then the negations of God based upon pure terrestrial logic, the arguments for and against, the history of religious beliefs, of schisms, heresies, philosophies, the affirmations as well as the doubts, the puerility of principles, the ferocious and bloody violence of the originators of hypotheses, the utter chaos of contestation, in short, every miserable effort of this wretchedly impotent being, man, impotent in conception, in imagination, in knowledge, all prove that he was thrown upon this absurdly small world for the sole purpose of eating, drinking, manufacturing children and little songs, and killing his neighbor by way of pastime.

Happy are those whom life satisfies, who are amused and content.

There are some such who, easily pleased, are delighted with everything. They love the sun and the rain, the snow and the fog; they love festivities as well as the calm of their own homes; they love all they see, all they do, all they say, all they hear.

They lead either an easy life, quiet and satisfied amid their offspring, or an agitated existence full of pleasures and amusement.

In neither case are they dull.

Life, for them, is an amusing kind of play, in which they are themselves actors; an excellent and varied show, which though offering nothing unexpected, thoroughly delights them.

Other men, however, who run through at a glance the narrow circle of human satisfactions, remain dismayed before the emptiness of happiness, the monotony and poverty of earthly joys.

As soon as they have reached thirty years of age all is ended for them. What have they to expect? Nothing now can interest them; they have made the circuit of our meager pleasures.

Happy are those who know not the loathsome weariness of the same acts constantly repeated; happy are those who have the strength to recommence each day the same task, with the same gestures, amid the same furniture, in front of the same horizon, under the same sky, to go out in the same streets, where they meet the same faces and the same animals. Happy are those who do not perceive with unutterable disgust that nothing changes, and that all is weariness.

We must indeed be a slow and narrow-minded race to be so easily pleased and satisfied with what

is. How is it that the worldly audience has not yet called out, "Curtain," has not yet demanded the next act, with other beings than mankind, other manners, other pleasures, other plants, other planets, other inventions, other adventures?

Is it possible no one has yet felt a loathing for the sameness of the human face, of the animals which by their unvarying instincts, transmitted in their seed from the first to the last of their race, seem to be but living machinery; a hatred of landscapes eternally the same, and of pleasures never varied?

Console yourself, it is said, by the love of science and art.

But is it not evident that we are always shut up in ourselves, without ever being able to quit ourselves, forever condemned to drag the chains of our wingless dream?

All the progress obtained by our cerebral effort consists in the ascertainment of material facts by means of instruments ridiculously imperfect, which however make up in a certain degree for the inefficiency of our organs. Every twenty years, some unhappy inquirer, who generally dies in the attempt, discovers that the atmosphere contains a gas hitherto unknown, that an imponderable, inexplicable, unqualifiable force can be obtained by rubbing a piece of wax on cloth; that among the innumerable unknown stars, there is one that has not yet been noticed in the immediate vicinity of another, which had not only been observed, but even designated by name for many years. What matter?

Our diseases are due to microbes? Very well. But where do those microbes come from? and the

diseases of these invisible ones? And the suns, whence do they come?

We know nothing, we understand nothing, we can do nothing, we foresee nothing, we imagine nothing, we are shut up, imprisoned in ourselves. And there are people who marvel at the genius of humanity!

Art? Painting consists in reproducing with coloring matter monotonous landscapes, which seldom resemble nature; in delineating men, and striving without ever succeeding, to give the aspect of living beings. Obstinately and uselessly one struggles to imitate what is; and the result is a motionless and dumb copy of the actions of life, which is barely comprehensible even to the educated eye that one has sought to attract.

Wherefore such efforts? Wherefore such a vain imitation? Wherefore this trivial reproduction of things in themselves so dull? How petty!

Poets do with words what painters try to do with colors. Again, wherefore?

When one has read four of the most talented, of the most ingenious authors, it is idle to open another. And nothing more can be learned. They also, these men, can but imitate men. They exhaust themselves in sterile labor. For, mankind changing not, their useless art is immutable. Ever since our poor minds have awakened man is the same; his sentiments, his beliefs, his sensations are the same. He has neither advanced nor retrograded; he has never moved. Of what use is it to me to learn what I am, to read what I think, to see myself portrayed in the trivial adventures of a novel?

Ah! if poets could vanquish space, explore the planets, discover other worlds, other beings; vary unceasingly for my mind the nature and form of things, convey me constantly through a changeful and surprising Unknown, open for me mysterious gates in unexpected and marvelous horizons, I would read them night and day. But they can, impotent as they are, but change the place of a word, and show me my own image, as the painters do. Of what use is all this?

For man's thought is motionless. And the precise limits, so nigh, so insurmountable, once attained, it turns like a horse in a circus, like a fly shut up in a bottle, fluttering against the sides and uselessly dashing itself against them. And yet, for want of any better occupation, thought is always a solace, when one lives alone.

On this little boat, rocked by the sea, that a wave could fill and upset, I know, I feel, how true it is that nothing we know exists, for the earth which floats in empty space is even more isolated, more lost than this skiff on the billows. Their importance is the same, their destiny will be accomplished. And I rejoice at understanding the nothingness of the belief and the vanity of the hopes which our insect-like pride has begotten!

I went to bed, cradled by the pitching of the boat, and slept with the deep slumber that one sleeps at sea, till the moment when Bernard awoke me to say:

"Bad weather, sir, we cannot sail this morning."

The wind had fallen, but the sea, very rough in the open, would not allow of our making sail for Saint-Raphaël. Another day that must be spent at Cannes!

At about twelve [illegible] got up, less strong than the [illegible] to take advantage of it and visit the squadron [illegible] jan.

[illegible] the roads, the "Bel-Ami" jumped about [illegible] and I had to steer very carefully in order to [illegible] wave which took us broadside, hav- [illegible] water dashed in my face. Soon how- [illegible] by the islands and entered the [illegible] of Sainte-Marguerite.

[illegible] down to the rocks, [illegible] summit hardly over- [illegible] the island. It is [illegible] down between two [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] e [illegible] de [illegible] ich [illegible] inte- [illegible] on the [illegible] bleed- [illegible] bliged to [illegible] at, which [illegible] ces against

tire set of appliances for drawing-room gymnastics. Out of these toys was made the knotted rope that the Marshal was to make use of. It was very slowly made, in order to give rise to no suspicion, and when finished it was hid away by a friendly hand in a corner of the prison yard.

The date of the flight was then decided upon. They chose a Sunday, the supervision appearing to be less rigorous on that day.

Madame Bazaine then absented herself for a few days.

The Marshal usually walked about in the yard till eight o'clock in the evening, in company with the governor of the prison, a pleasant man whose agreeable conversation was a resource to Bazaine. Then he would go back to his rooms, which the chief jailer locked and bolted in the presence of his superior officer.

On the evening of the escape, Bazaine pretended he was indisposed, and expressed a wish to retire an hour earlier than usual. He returned therefore to his apartment, but as soon as the governor had gone off to call the jailer and tell him to lock up the captive, the Marshal came out again quickly and hid himself in the yard.

The empty prison was locked up, and each man went home.

At about eleven o'clock Bazaine, armed with the ladder, left his hiding place, fastened the ropes, and made his descent on to the rocks.

At dawn of day, an accomplice unfastened the ladder and threw it over the walls.

Toward eight o'clock in the morning, the governor, surprised at not seeing anything of his prisoner, who

was wont to be an early riser, sent to inquire about him. The Marshal's valet refused, however, to disturb his master.

At length at nine o'clock the governor forced open the door and found the cage empty.

On her side Madame Bazaine, in order to carry out her scheme, had applied to a man who was indebted to her husband for a most important service. She appealed to a grateful heart and gained an ally both energetic and devoted. Together they settled all the details; she then went under an assumed name to Genoa, and talking of an excursion to Naples hired for a thousand francs (forty pounds sterling) a day, a little Italian steamer, stipulating that the trip should last at least a week, and that it might be extended to another week on the same terms.

The vessel started, but no sooner were they at sea than the traveler appeared to change her mind, and asked the captain if he would object to going as far as Cannes to fetch her sister-in-law. The sailor willingly consented, and he dropped anchor on Sunday evening in the Gulf of Juan.

Madame Bazaine was set on shore and ordered the boat to keep within hail. Her devoted accomplice was awaiting her in another boat near the promenade of the Croisette, and they crossed the channel which separates the mainland from the little island of Sainte-Marguerite. There her husband was waiting on the rocks, his clothes torn, face bruised, and hands bleeding. The sea being rather rough, he was obliged to wade through the water to reach the boat, which otherwise would have been dashed to pieces against the coast.

When they returned to the mainland they cast the boat adrift.

They rejoined the first boat, and then at last the vessel, which had remained with steam up. Madame Bazaine informed the captain that her sister-in-law was not well enough to join her, and pointing to the Marshal, she added:

"Not having a servant, I have hired a valet. The fool has just tumbled down on the rocks and got himself in the mess you see. Send him, if you please, down to the sailors, and give him what is necessary to dress his wounds and mend his clothes."

Bazaine went down and spent the night in the forecastle.

The next morning at break of day they were out at sea; then Madame Bazaine again changed her mind, and pleading indisposition, had herself reconducted to Genoa.

However, the news of the escape had already spread, and the populace hearing of it, a clamoring mob assembled under the hotel windows. The uproar soon became so violent that the terrified landlord insisted on the travelers escaping by a private door.

I relate this story as it was told to me, but I guarantee nothing.

We drew near the squadron, the heavy ironclads standing out in single file, like battle towers built in the sea. They were the "Colbert," the "Dévastation," the "Amiral-Duperré," the "Courbet," the "Indomptable," and the "Richelieu"; two dispatch boats, the "Hirondelle" and the "Milan"; and four torpedo boats going through evolutions in the gulf.

I wanted to visit the "Courbet," as it passes just now for the most perfect type in the French navy.

Nothing can give a better idea of human labor, of the intricate and formidable labor done by the ingeniously clever hands of the puny human animal, than the enormous iron citadels which float and sail about bearing an army of soldiers, an arsenal of monstrous arms, the enormous masses of which are made of tiny pieces fitted, soldered, forged, bolted together, a toil of ants and giants, which shows at the same time all the genius, all the weakness, and all the irretrievable barbarousness of the race, so active and so feeble, directing all its efforts toward creating instruments for its own self-destruction.

Those who in former days raised up cathedrals in stone, carved as finely as any lacework, fairy-like palaces to shelter childish and pious fancies, were they worth less than those who nowadays launch forth on the sea these iron houses, real temples of Death?

At the same moment that I leave the ship to get on board my cockleshell I hear the sound of firing on shore. It is the regiment at Antibes practising rifle shooting on the sands and among the pine-woods. The smoke rises in white flakes, like evaporating clouds of cotton, and I can see the red trousers of the soldiers as they run along the beach.

The naval officers suddenly become interested, point their glasses landward, and their hearts beat faster at this spectacle of mimic warfare.

At the mere mention of the word war, I am seized with a sense of bewilderment, as though I heard of witchcraft, of the inquisition, of some far distant

thing, ended long ago, abominable and monstrous, against all natural law.

When we talk of cannibals, we proudly smile and proclaim our superiority over these savages. Which are the savages, the true savages? Those who fight to eat the vanquished, or those who fight to kill, only to kill?

The gallant little soldiers running about over there, are as surely doomed to death as the flocks of sheep driven along the road by the butcher. They will fall on some plain, with their heads split open by saber cuts, or their chests riddled by bullets, and yet they are young men who might work, produce something, be useful. Their fathers are old and poverty-stricken, their mothers, who during twenty years have loved them, adored them as only mothers can adore, may perchance hear in six months or a year, that the son, the child, the big fellow, reared with so much care, at such an expense, and with so much love, has been cast in a hole like a dead dog, after having been ripped open by a bullet and trampled, crushed, mangled by the rush of cavalry charges. Why have they killed her boy, her beautiful boy, her sole hope, her pride, her life? She cannot understand. Yes, indeed, why?

War! fighting! slaughtering! butchering men! And to think that now, in our own century, with all our civilization, with the expansion of science and the height of philosophy to which the human race is supposed to have attained, we should have schools, in which we teach the art of killing, of killing from afar, to perfection, numbers of people at the same time; poor devils, innocent men, fathers of families,

men of untarnished reputation. The most astounding thing is that the people do not rise up against the governing power. What difference is there then between monarchies and republics? And what is more astounding still, why does society not rise up bodily in rebellion at the word "war"?

Ah, yes, we shall ever continue to live borne down by the old and odious customs, the criminal prejudices, the ferocious ideas of our barbarous forefathers, for we are but animals, and we shall remain animals led only by instinct that nothing will ever change.

Should we not have spurned any other than Victor Hugo, who should have launched forth the grand cry of deliverance and truth?

"To-day, might is called violence, and is beginning to be condemned; war is arraigned. Civilization, at the demand of all humanity, directs an inquiry and indicts the great criminal brief against conquerors and generals. The nations are beginning to understand that the aggrandizement of a crime can in no way lessen it; that if murder is a crime, to murder a great many does not create any attenuating circumstance; that if robbery is a disgrace, invasion cannot be a glory.

"Ah! Let us proclaim the peremptory truth, let us dishonor war."

Idle anger, poetic indignation! War is more venerated than ever.

A clever artist in such matters, a slaughtering genius, M. de Moltke, replied one day to some peace delegates, in the following extraordinary words:

"War is holy and of divine institution; it is one of the sacred laws of nature; it keeps alive in men all the great and noble sentiments, honor, disinterestedness, virtue, courage, in one word it prevents them from falling into the most hideous materialism."

Therefore to collect a herd of some four hundred thousand men, march day and night without respite, to think of nothing, study nothing, learn nothing, read nothing, be of no earthly use to anyone, rot with dirt, lie down in mire, live like brutes in a continual besotment, pillage towns, burn villages, ruin nations; then meeting another similar agglomeration of human flesh, rush upon it, shed lakes of blood, cover plains with pounded flesh mingled with muddy and bloody earth; pile up heaps of slain; have arms and legs blown off, brains scattered without benefit to anyone, and perish at the corner of some field while your old parents, your wife and children are dying of hunger; this is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism!

Warriors are the scourges of the earth. We struggle against nature and ignorance; against obstacles of all kinds, in order to lessen the hardships of our miserable existence. Men, benefactors, scholars, wear out their lives toiling, seeking what may assist, what may help, what may solace their brethren. Eager in their useful work, they pile up discovery on discovery, enlarging the human mind, extending science, adding something each day to the stock of human knowledge, to the welfare, the comfort, the strength of their country.

War is declared. In six months the generals have destroyed the efforts of twenty years' patience and genius. And this is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism.

We have seen war. We have seen men maddened and gone back to their brute estate, killing for mere pleasure, killing out of terror, out of bravado, from

sheer ostentation. Then when right no longer exists, when law is dead, when all notion of justice has disappeared, we have seen ruthlessly shot down, innocent beings who, picked up along the road, had become objects of suspicion simply because they were afraid. We have seen dogs, as they lay chained up at their master's gate, killed in order to try a new revolver; we have seen cows riddled with bullets as they lay in the fields, without reason, only to fire off guns, just for fun.

And this is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism. To invade a country, to kill the man who defends his home on the plea that he wears a smock and has no forage cap on his head, to burn down the houses of the poor creatures who are without bread, to break, to steal furniture, drink the wine found in the cellars, violate the women found in the streets, consume thousands of francs' worth of powder, and leave behind misery and cholera.

This is what is called, not falling into the most hideous materialism.

What have they ever done to show their intelligence, these valiant warriors? Nothing. What have they invented? Guns and cannons. That is all.

The inventor of the wheelbarrow, has he not done more for humanity by the simple and practical idea of fitting a wheel between two poles, than the inventor of modern fortifications?

What remains of Greece? Books and marbles. Is she great by what she conquered, or by what she produced? Was it the invasion of the Persians that prevented her from falling into the most hideous ma-

terialism? Was it the invasion of the barbarians that saved Rome and regenerated her?

Did Napoleon the First continue the great intellectual movement begun by the philosophers at the end of the last century?

Well, yes, since governments assume the right of death over the people, there is nothing astonishing in the people sometimes assuming the right of death over governments.

They defend themselves. They are right. No one has an absolute right to govern others. It can only be done for the good of those who are governed. Whosoever governs must consider it as much his duty to avoid war as it is that of the captain of a vessel to avoid shipwreck.

When a captain has lost his ship, he is judged and condemned if found guilty of negligence or even of incapacity.

Why should not governments be judged after the declaration of every war? If the people understood this, if they took the law into their own hands against the murdering powers, if they refused to allow themselves to be killed without a reason, if they used their weapons against those who distributed them to slaughter with, that day war would indeed be a dead letter. But that day will never dawn!

III.

AGAY

"FINE weather, sir."

I get up and go on deck. It is three o'clock in the morning; the sea is calm, the infinite heavens look like an immense shady vault sown with grains of fire. A very light breeze comes from off the land.

The coffee is hot, we swallow it down, and, without losing a moment, in order to take advantage of the favorable wind, we set sail.

Once more we glide over the waters toward the open sea. The coast disappears, all around us looks black. It is indeed a sensation, an enervating and delicious emotion to plunge onward into the empty night, into the deep silence on the sea, far from everything. It seems as if one were quitting the world, as if one would never reach any land, as though there were no more shores and even no more days. At my feet, a little lantern throws a light upon the compass that guides me on my way. We must run at least three miles in the open to round

Cape Roux and the Drammont in safety, whatever may be the wind when the sun has risen. To avoid any accidents, I have had the side-lights lit, red on the port and green on the starboard side. And I enjoy with rapture this silent, uninterrupted, quiet flight.

Suddenly a cry is heard in front of us. I am startled, for the voice is near; and I can perceive nothing, nothing but the obscure wall of darkness into which I am plunging, and which closes again behind me. Raymond who watches forward says to me: "'Tis a lugger going east, put the helm up, sir, we shall pass astern." And of a sudden, nigh at hand, uprises a vague but startling phantom; the large drifting shadow of a big sail, seen but for a few seconds and quickly vanishing. Nothing is more strange, more fantastic, and more thrilling, than these rapid apparitions at sea during the night. The fishing and sand-boats carry no lights, they are therefore only seen as they pass by, and they impart a tightening of the heart strings, as of some supernatural encounter.

I hear in the distance the whistling of a bird. It approaches, passes by, and goes off. Oh that I could wander like it!

At last dawn breaks, slowly, gently, without a cloud, and the day begins, a real summer's day.

Raymond asserts that we shall have an east wind, Bernard still believes in a westerly one, and advises my changing our course, and sailing on the starboard tack straight toward the Drammont, which stands out in the distance. I am at once of his opinion, and under the gentle breath of a dying breeze, we draw nearer to the Esterel. The long red shore drops into

the blue water, giving it a violet tinge. It is strange, pretty, bristling with numberless points and gulfs, capricious and coquettish rocks, the thousand whims of a much admired mountain. On its slopes, the pine forests reach up to the granite summits, which resemble castles, towns, and armies of stones running after each other. And at its foot the sea is so clear, that the sandy shoals or the weedy bottoms can be distinguished.

Ay, verily, I do feel on certain days such a horror of all that is, that I long for death. The invariable monotony of landscapes, faces, and thoughts, becomes an intensely acute suffering. The meanness of the universe astonishes and revolts me, the littleness of all things fills me with disgust, and I am overwhelmed by the platitude of human beings.

At other times, on the contrary, I enjoy everything as an animal does. If my spirit, restless, agitated, hypertrophied by work, bounds onward to hopes that are not those of our race, and then after having realized that all is vanity, falls back into a contempt for all that is, my animal body, at least, is enraptured with all the intoxication of life. Like the birds, I love the sky—like the prowling wolf, the forests; I delight in rocky heights like a chamois; the thick grass I love to roll in and gallop over like a horse, and, like a fish, I revel in the clear waters. I feel thrilling within me the sensations of all the different species of animals, of all their instincts, of all the confused longings of inferior creatures. I love the earth as they do, not as other men do; I love it without admiring it, without poetry, without exultation; I love with a deep and animal attachment, contemptible yet

holy, all that lives, all that grows, all we see; for all this, leaving my spirit calm, excites only my eyes and my heart: the days, the nights, the rivers, the seas, the storms, the woods, the hues of dawn, the glance of woman, her very touch.

The gentle ripple of water on the sandy shore or on the rocky granite affects and moves me, and the joy that fills me as I feel myself driven forward by the wind, and carried along by the waves, proceeds from the abandonment of myself to the brutal and natural forces of creation, from my return to a primitive state.

When the weather is beautiful as it is to-day, I feel in my veins the blood of the lascivious and vagabond fauns of olden times. I am no longer the brother of mankind, but the brother of all creatures and all nature!

The sun mounts above the horizon. The breeze dies away as it did the day before yesterday; but the west wind foretold by Bernard does not rise any more than the easterly one, announced by Raymond.

Till ten o'clock we float motionless like a wreck, then a little breath from the open sea starts us on our road, falls, rises again, seems to mock us, glancing across the sail, promising at each moment a breeze that does not come. It is nothing, a mere whiff, a flutter of a fan; nevertheless it is sufficient to prevent our being stationary. The porpoises, those clowns of the sea, play about around us, dashing out of the water with rapid bounds as though they would take flight, striking into the air like lightning, then plunging and rising again further off.

At about one o'clock, as we lay broadside on to Agay, the breeze completely gave way, and I realized that I should sleep out at sea if I did not man the boat to tow the yacht and take shelter in the bay.

I therefore made the two men get into the dingy, and when at a distance of some thirty yards or so, they began to tug me along. A fierce sun was glaring on the water, and its burning rays beat down upon the decks.

The two sailors rowed in slow and regular fashion like worn-out cranks, which, though working with difficulty, ceaselessly continue their mechanical labor.

The bay of Agay forms a very pretty dock, well sheltered and closed on one side by upright, red rocks, overlooked by the semaphore on the summit of the mountain, and prolonged toward the open sea by the Île d'Or, so called on account of its color; while on the other side is a line of sunken rocks, and a small headland level with the surface of the water, bearing a lighthouse to mark the entry.

At the further end is an inn, ready for the entertainment of skippers of vessels that have taken refuge there from stress of weather, or for fishermen during the summer; and a railway station where trains only stop twice a day, and where no one ever gets out; and a pretty river that winds away into the Esterel, as far as the valley named Malin-fermet, which is as full of pink oleanders as any African ravine.

No road leads from the interior to the delicious bay. A pathway, only, takes you to Saint-Raphaël, passing through the porphyry quarries of Drammont; but no vehicle could use it. We are therefore quite lost in the mountain.

I resolved to wander about till nightfall, in the paths bordered by cistus and lentisk. The scent of wild plants, strong and perfumed, filled the air, mingling with the powerful resinous breath of the forest, which seemed to pant in the heat.

After an hour's walk I was deep among the pine trees, scattered sparsely on a gentle declivity of the mountain. The purple granite—the bones of the earth—seemed reddened by the sun, and I wended my way slowly, happy as the lizards must be on burning hot stones, when I perceived on the summit of the mountain, coming toward me, without seeing me, two lovers lost in the depths of their love dream.

'Twas a charmingly pretty sight; on they came, with arms entwined, moving with absent footsteps through the alternating sun and shade, that flecked the sloping banks.

She appeared to me very graceful and very simple, with a gray traveling dress and a bold, coquettish felt hat. I hardly saw him, I only noticed that he seemed well bred. I had seated myself behind the trunk of a pine-tree to watch them pass by. They did not perceive me, and continued their descent with interlocked arms, silently, and without a word, so much did their love absorb them.

When I lost sight of them, I felt as though a sadness had fallen on my heart. A felicity that I knew not had passed near me, and I guessed that it was the best of all. And I returned toward the bay of Agay, too dejected now to continue my stroll.

Until the evening, I lay stretched out on the grass, by the side of the river, and at about seven o'clock I went into the inn for dinner.

My men had warned the innkeeper, and he was expecting me. My table was set in the whitewashed room by the side of another at which were already settled my love-stricken couple, face to face, with eyes fondly gazing upon each other.

I felt ashamed at disturbing them, as though I were committing a mean and unbecoming action.

They stared at me for a few seconds and then resumed their low-toned conversation.

The innkeeper who has known me for a long time took a seat near mine. He talked of wild boars and rabbits, the fine weather, the *mistral,* about an Italian captain who had slept at the inn a few nights before, and then, to flatter my vanity, he praised my yacht, the black hull of which I could see through the window, with its tall mast, and my red and white pennant floating aloft.

My neighbors, who had eaten very rapidly, soon left. As for me, I dawdled about looking at the slight crescent of the moon, shedding its soft rays over the little roadstead. At last I saw my dingy nearing the shore, scattering lines of silver as it advanced through the pale motionless light that fell upon the water.

When I went down to my boat, I saw the lovers standing on the beach gazing at the sea.

And as I went off to the quick sound of the oars, I still distinguished their outlines on the shore, their shadows erect side by side. They seemed to fill the bay, the night, the heavens, with a symbolic grandeur, so penetrating, so widespread was the atmosphere of love they diffused around them over the far horizon.

And when I had reached my yacht I remained

seated a long while on deck, overcome with sadness without knowing wherefore, filled with regrets without knowing why, unwilling even to decide on going down to my cabin, as though I would fain absorb a little more of the tenderness they had shed around them. Suddenly, one of the windows of the inn was lit up, and I saw their profiles on the bright background. Then my loneliness overpowered me, and in the balminess of the springlike night, at the soft sound of the waves on the sand, under the delicate crescent shedding its rays over the sea, I felt in my heart such an intense desire for love, that I was near crying out in my envious distress.

Then, all at once, I became ashamed of this weakness, and, unwilling to admit to myself that I was a man like another, I accused the moonshine of disturbing my reason.

I have moreover always believed that the moon exercises a mysterious influence on the human brain.

It fills poets with vagaries, rendering them delightful or ridiculous, and produces on lovers' affections, the effect of Ruhmkorff's pile on electric currents. The man who loves in a normal manner under the sunlight adores with frenzy under the moon.

A youthful and charming woman maintained to me one day, I forget on what occasion, that moonstrokes are infinitely more dangerous than sunstrokes. They are caught, she said, unawares, out walking perchance on a beautiful night, and they are incurable; you remain mad; not raving mad, not mad enough to be shut up, but struck with a special madness, gentle, incurable; and you no longer think on any subject like other men.

I have certainly been moonstruck to-night, for I feel strangely unreasonable and light-headed; and the little crescent in its downward course toward the sea affects me, melts me to tears, and rends my heart.

Wherein lies the power of seduction of this moon, aged and dead planet that it is, rambling through the heavens with its yellow face and sad, ghostly light, that it should thus agitate us, we whom even our vagabond thoughts disturb?

Do we love it because it is dead? as the poet Haraucourt says:

"Puis ce fut l'âge blond des tiédeurs et des vents.
La lune se peupla de murmures vivants:
Elle eut des mers sans fond et des fleuves sans nombre,
Des troupeaux, des cités, des pleurs, des cris joyeux,
Elle eut l'amour; elle eut ses arts, ses lois, ses dieux,
*Et lentement rentra dans l'ombre."**

Do we love it because the poets, to whom we owe the eternal illusion that surrounds us in this world, have dimmed our sight by all the images they have seen in its pallid rays, have taught our over-excited sensibility to feel in a thousand different ways the soft and monotonous effects it sheds over the world?

When it rises behind the trees, when it pours forth its shimmering light on the flowing river, when

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* "Then it was the fair age of balminess and breezes.
The moon became peopled with living whispers;
She had bottomless seas and numberless rivers,
Flocks, cities, tears, and cries full of joy,
She had love; she had her arts, her laws, her gods.
Then slowly sank back into darkness."

it filters through the boughs on to the sand of the shaded alleys, when it mounts solitary in the black and empty sky, when it dips toward the sea, shedding out on the undulating surface of the waters a vast pathway of light, are we not haunted by all the charming verses with which it has inspired great dreamers?

If we wander forth by night in joyous spirits, and if we see its smooth round circle, like a yellow eye watching us, perched just over a roof, Musset's immortal ballad is recalled to our mind.

And is it not he, the mocking poet, who immediately presents it to us through his eyes?

"C'était dans la nuit brune
Sur le clocher jauni
La lune
Comme un point sur un I.

"Lune, quel esprit sombre
Promène au bout d'un fil,
Dans l'ombre,
Ta face ou ton profil?" *

If we walk in early night, full of sadness, on the beach by the side of the ocean illuminated by its rays, do we not, in spite of ourselves, at once remember the two grand and melancholy lines:

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* "'Twas in the dusky night,
Above the yellowed steeple,
Stood the moon
Like a dot on an I.

By what somber spirit
Is thy face or profile,
Swung as from a thread
Through the shadows of the sky?"

"Seule au-dessus des mers, la lune voyageant,
*Laisse dans les flots noirs tomber ses pleurs d'argent?"**

If we awake, to find our bed lighted up by a long beam coming in at the window, do we not feel at once as though the white figure evoked by Catulle Mendès were descending upon us:

"Elle venait, avec un lis dans chaque main,
La pente d'un rayon lui servant de chemin?"†

If, in some evening walk in the country, we suddenly hear the long, sinister howl of a farm dog, are we not forcibly struck by the recollection of the admirable poem of Leconte de Lisle, "Les Hurleurs"?

"Seule, la lune pâle, en écartant la nue,
Comme une morne lampe, oscillait tristement.
Monde muet, marqué d'un signe de colère,
Débris d'un globe mort au hasard disperse,
Elle laissait tomber de son orbe glacé
Un reflet sépulcral sur l'océan polaire."‡

At the evening trysting place one saunters slowly through the leafy path, with arm encircling the beloved one, pressing her hand, and kissing her brow.

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* "Alone above the seas, the wandering moon
Lets fall her silver tears in the black billows."

† "With a lily in each hand she came,
The slanting beam her pathway."

‡ "Alone the pale moon, parting the clouds
Like a gloomy lamp, sadly oscillates.
Dumb world, marked by a sign of anger,
Fragment of a dead globe dispersed at haphazard,
She let fall from her frozen orb
A sepulchral reflection on a polar ocean."

She is perhaps a little tired, a little moved, and walks with lagging step.

A bench appears in sight, under the leaves bathed by the soft light, as by a calm shower.

In our hearts and minds, like an exquisite love-song, the two charming lines start up:

"Et réveiller, pour s'asseoir à sa place,
Le clair de lune endormi sur le banc!" *

Can one see the lessening crescent, as on this evening, cast its fair profile on the vast sky spangled with stars, without thinking of the end of that masterpiece of Victor Hugo's, which is called "Boaz Endormi":

"Et Ruth se demandait,
Immobile, ouvrant l'œil à demi sous ses voiles,
Quel Dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles?" †

And who has better described the moon, courteous and tender to all lovers, than Hugo:

"La nuit vint, tout se tut; les flambeaux s'éteignirent;
Dans les bois assombris, les sources se plaignirent.
Le rossignol, caché dans son nid ténébreux,
Chanta comme un poète et comme un amoureux.

* "And, to take her place, one awakens
A ray of moonlight asleep on the bench."

† "And Ruth, motionless,
Asked herself, as she opened her half-closed eye under her veil,
What God, what reaper of the eternal summer,
Had negligently thrown as he passed by
This golden sickle in the starry field."

Chacun se dispersa sous les profonds feuillages,
Les folles, en riant, entraînèrent les sages;
L'amante s'en alla dans l'ombre avec l'amant;
Et troublés comme ou l'est en songe, vaguement,
Ils sentaient par degrés se mêler à leur âme,
A leurs discours secrets, à leur regards de flamme,
A leurs cœurs, à leurs sens, à leur molle raison,
Le clair de lune bleu qui baignait l'horizon?" *

And I remember also the admirable prayer to the moon, which is the opening scene of the eleventh book of Apuleius's "Golden Ass."

Still, all the songs of mankind are not enough to account for the sentimental sadness with which this poor planet inspires us.

We pity the moon, in spite of ourselves, without knowing the reason, and for this it is we love it.

Even the tender feeling we bestow on it is mingled with compassion; we pity it like an old maid, for we vaguely feel, the poets notwithstanding, that it is not a corpse but a cold virgin.

Planets, like woman, need a husband, and the poor moon, disdained by the sun, is nothing more nor less than an old maid, as we mortals say.

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* "Night fell, all was hushed; the torches died out
Under the darkening woods, the springs lament,
The nightingale, hidden in its shady nest,
Sang like a poet and like a lover.
In the depths of the dark foliage all dispersed,
The madcaps laughing carried off the wise,
The fair one disappeared in the gloom with her lover
And with the vague trouble of some dream
They felt by degrees intermingled with their souls,
With their secret thoughts, with their glances of flame,
With their hearts, their senses, with their yielding reason
The blue moonlight that bathed the vast horizon."

And it is for this reason that, with its timid light, it fills us with hopes that cannot be realized and desires that cannot be fulfilled.

All that we vainly and dimly wait and hope for upon this earth works in our hearts like mysterious but powerless sap, beneath the pale rays of the moon. When we raise our eyes to it, we quiver with inexpressible tenderness and are thrilled by impossible dreams!

The narrow crescent, a mere thread of gold, now dipped its keen gleaming point in the water, and gradually plunged gently and slowly till the other point, so delicate that I could not detect the moment of its vanishing, had also disappeared.

Then I raised my eyes toward the inn. The lighted window was closed. A dull melancholy crushed my heart, and I went below.

No sooner had I lain down than I felt sleep was impossible, and I remained lying on my back with my eyes closed, my thoughts on the alert, and all my nerves quivering. Not a motion, not a sound, near or far, nothing but the breathing of the two sailors through the thin bulkhead could be heard.

Suddenly something grated. What was it? I know not. Some block in the rigging, no doubt; but the tone—tender, plaintive, and mournful—of the sound sent a thrill through me; then nothing more. An infinite silence seemed to spread from the earth to the stars; nothing more—not a breath, not a shiver on the water, not a vibration of the yacht, nothing; and then again the slight and unrecognizable moan recommenced. It seemed to me as I listened as though a jagged blade were sawing at my heart. Just as cer-

tain noises, certain notes, certain voices harrow us, and in one second pour into our soul all it can contain of sorrow, desperation, and anguish. I listened expectantly, and heard it again, the identical sound which now seemed to emanate from my own self,—to be wrung out of my nerves,—or rather, to resound in a secret, deep, and desolate cry. Yes, it was a cruel though familiar voice, a voice expected, and full of desperation. It passed over me with its weird and feeble tones as an uncanny thing, sowing broadcast the appalling terrors of delirium, for it had power to awake the horrible distress which lies slumbering in the inmost heart of every living man. What was it? It was the voice ringing with reproaches which tortures our soul, clamoring ceaselessly—obscure, painful, harassing; a voice, unappeasable and mysterious, which will not be ignored; ferocious in its reproaches for what we have done, as well as for what we have left undone; the voice of remorse and useless regrets for the days gone by and the women unloved; for the joys that were vain and the hopes that are dead; the voice of the past, of all that has disappointed us, fled us and disappeared forever, of what we have not attained and shall never attain; the small shrill voice which ever proclaims the failure of our life, the uselessness of our efforts, the impotence of our minds, and the weakness of our flesh.

It spoke to me in that short whisper, recommencing after each dismal silence of the dark night; it spoke of all I would have loved, of all that I had vaguely desired, expected, dreamed of, of all that I would have longed to see, to understand, to know, to taste, all that my insatiable, poor, and weak spirit had

touched upon with useless hope, of all that toward which it had been tempted to soar, without being able to tear asunder the chains of ignorance that held it.

Ah! I have coveted all, and delighted in nothing. I should have required the vitality of a whole race, the varying intelligence, all the faculties, all the powers scattered among all beings, and the thousands of existences in reserve; for I bear within myself every desire and every curiosity, and I am compelled to see all and grasp nothing.

From whence, therefore, arises this anguish at living, since to the generality of men it only brings satisfaction? Wherefore this unknown torture, which preys upon me? Why should I not know the reality of pleasure, expectation, and possession?

It is because I carry within me that second sight which is at the same time the power and despair of writers. I write because I understand and suffer from all that is, because I know it too well, and above all because, without being able to enjoy it, I contemplate it inwardly in the mirror of my thoughts.

Let no one envy, but rather pity us, for in the following manner does the literary man, differ from his fellow-creatures:

For him no simple feeling any longer exists. All he sees, his joys, his pleasures, his suffering, his despair, all instantaneously become subjects of observation. In spite of all, in spite of himself, he analyzes everything, hearts, faces, gestures, intonations. As soon as he has seen, whatever it may be, he must know the wherefore. He has not a spark of enthusiasm, not a cry, not a kiss that is spontaneous,

not one instantaneous action done merely because it must be done, unconsciously, without reflection, without understanding, without noting it down afterward.

If he suffers, he notes down his suffering, and classes it in his memory; he says to himself as he leaves the cemetery, where he has left the being he has loved most in the world: "It is curious what I felt; it was like an intoxication of pain, etc. . . ." And then he recalls all the details, the attitude of those near him, the discordant gestures of feigned grief, the insincere faces, and a thousand little insignificant trifles noted by the artistic observation,—the sign of the cross made by an old woman leading a child, a ray of light through a window, a dog that crossed the funeral procession, the effect of the hearse under the tall yew-trees in the cemetery, the face of the undertaker and its muscular contractions, the strain of the four men who lowered the coffin into the grave—a thousand things, in fact, that a poor fellow suffering with all his heart, soul, and strength, would never have noticed.

He has seen all, noticed all, remembered all, in spite of himself, because he is above all a literary man, and his intellect is constructed in such a manner that the reverberation in him is much more vivid, more natural, so to speak, than the first shock—the echo more sonorous than the original sound.

He seems to have two souls: one that notes, explains, comments on each sensation of its neighbor, and the natural soul common to all men. He lives condemned to be the mere reflection of himself or others; condemned to look on, and see himself feel, act, love, think, suffer, and never to be free like the rest of man-

kind—simply, genially, frankly, without analyzing his own soul after every joy, and every agony.

If he converses, his words often wear the air of slander, and that only because his thoughts are clear-sighted and he cannot refrain from investigating the secret springs which regulate the feelings and actions of others.

If he writes, he cannot refrain from throwing into his books all that he has seen, all he has gathered, all he knows; he makes no exception in favor of friends or relations, but he pitilessly lays bare the hearts of those he loves or has loved, with a cruel impartiality,—exaggerating even to make the effect more powerful,—wholly absorbed by his work and in no wise by his affections.

And if he loves, if he loves a woman, he will dissect her as he would a corpse in a hospital. All she says, all she does, is instantly weighed in the delicate scales of observation which he carries within him, and is docketed according to its documentary importance. If in an unpremeditated impulse she throws herself on his neck, he will judge the action, considering its opportuneness, its correctness, its dramatic power, and will tacitly condemn it if he feels it artificial or badly done.

Actor and spectator of himself and of others, he is never solely an actor, like the good folk who take life easily. Everything around him becomes transparent, hearts, deeds, secret intentions; and he suffers from a strange malady, a kind of duality of the mind, that makes of him a terribly vibrating and complicated piece of machinery, fatiguing even to himself.

Owing to his peculiarly morbid sensibility, he is no happier than one flayed alive, to whom nearly every sensation becomes a torture.

I can remember dark days in which my heart was so lacerated by things I had only caught sight of for a second, that the memory of those visions has remained within me like grievous wounds.

One morning, in the Avenue de l'Opéra, in the midst of a stirring and joyous crowd, intoxicated with the sunlight of the month of May, I suddenly caught sight of a creature for whom one could find no name, an old woman bent double, dressed in tatters that had been garments, with an old straw bonnet stripped of its former ornaments, the ribbons and flowers having disappeared in times immemorial. And she went by, dragging her feet along so painfully, that I felt in my heart, as much as she did, more than she could, the aching pain of each of her steps. Two sticks supported her. She passed along without seeing anyone, indifferent to all — to the noise, the crowd, the carriages, and the sun! Where was she going? She carried something in a paper parcel hanging by a string. What was it? Bread? Yes, without a doubt. Nobody, no neighbor had been able or willing to do this errand for her, and she had undertaken herself, the terrible journey from her garret to the baker. At least two hours must she spend, going and coming. And what a mournful struggle! Surely as fearful a road as that of Christ on his way to Calvary!

I raised my eyes toward the roofs of the tall houses. She was going up there! When would she get there? How many panting pauses on the steps, in the little stairway so black and winding?

Everyone turned round to look at her! They murmured, "Poor woman!" and passed on. Her skirt, her rag of a skirt hardly holding to her dilapidated body, draggled over the pavement. And there was a mind there! A mind? No, but fearful, incessant, harassing suffering! Oh! the misery of the aged without bread, the aged without hope, without children, without money, with nothing before them but death; do we ever think of it? Do we ever think of the aged, famished creatures in the garrets? Do we think of the tears shed by those dimmed eyes, once bright, joyous, full of happy emotion?

Another time it was raining. I was alone, shooting in the plains of Normandy, plodding through the deep-plowed fields of greasy mud, that melted and slipped under my feet. From time to time, a partridge overtaken, hiding behind a clod of earth, flew off heavily through the downpour. The report of my gun, smothered by the sheet of water that fell from the skies, hardly sounded louder than the crack of a whip, and the gray bird fell, its feathers bespattered with blood.

I felt sad unto tears, tears as plentiful as the showers that were weeping over the world and over me; my heart was filled with sadness and I was overcome with fatigue, so that I could hardly raise my feet, heavily coated as they were with the clay soil. I was returning home when I saw in the middle of the fields, the doctor's gig following a crossroad.

The low black carriage was passing along, covered by its round hood and drawn by a brown horse, like an omen of death wandering through the country on this sinister day. Suddenly, it pulled

up, the doctor's head made its appearance, and he called out:

"Here."

I went toward him, and he said:

"Will you help me to nurse a case of diphtheria? I am all alone, and I want some one to hold the child, while I take out the false membrane from her throat."

"I'll come with you," I replied, and I got into his carriage.

He told me the following story:

Diphtheria, terrible diphtheria that suffocates unhappy creatures, had made its appearance at poor Martinet's farm.

Both the father and son had died at the beginning of the week. The mother and daughter were now in their turn dying.

A neighbor who attended to them, feeling suddenly unwell, had taken flight the day before, leaving the door wide open, and abandoning the two sick people on their straw pallets, alone, without anything to drink, choking, suffocating, dying; alone, for the last twenty-four hours!

The doctor had cleaned out the mother's throat and made her swallow; but the child, maddened by pain and the anguish of suffocation, had buried and hidden its head in the straw bedding, absolutely refusing to allow itself to be touched.

The doctor, accustomed to such scenes, repeated in a sad and resigned voice:

"I cannot really spend all day with these patients. By Jove, these things do give one a heartache, when you think that they have remained twenty-four hours

without drinking, with the wind blowing the rain in on to their very beds! All the hens had taken shelter in the fireplace."

We had reached the farm. The doctor fastened his horse to the bough of an apple-tree before the door, and we went in. A strong smell of sickness and damp, of fever and moldiness, of hospital and cellar greeted our nostrils as we entered. In this gray and dismal house, fireless and without sign of life, it was bitterly cold; the swampy chill of a marsh. The clock had stopped; the rain fell down into the great fireplace, where the hens had scattered the ashes, and we heard in a dark corner the noise of a pair of bellows, husky and rapid. It was the breathing of the child. The mother, stretched out in a kind of large wooden box, the peasant's bed, and covered with old rags and old clothes, seemed to rest quietly. She slightly turned her head toward us.

The doctor inquired:

"Have you got a candle?"

She answered in a low, depressed tone:

"In the cupboard."

He took the light and led me to the further end of the room toward the little girl's crib.

She lay panting, with emaciated cheeks, glistening eyes, and tangled hair, a pitiable sight. At each breath, deep hollows could be seen in her thin strained neck. Stretched out on her back, she convulsively clutched with both hands the rags that covered her, and directly she caught sight of us, she turned her face away and hid herself in the straw.

I took hold of her shoulders, and the doctor, forcing her to open her mouth, pulled out of her throat

a long white strip of skin, which seemed to me as dry as a bit of leather.

Her breathing immediately became easier, and she drank a little. The mother raising herself on her elbow watched us. She stammered out:

"Is it done?"

"Yes, it's done."

"Are we going to be left all alone?"

A terror, a terrible terror shook her voice, the terror of solitude, of loneliness, of darkness, and of death that she felt so near to her.

I answered:

"No, my good woman, I will stay till the doctor sends you a nurse."

And turning toward the doctor, I added:

"Send old mother Mauduit; I will pay her."

"Very well, I'll send her at once."

He shook my hand, and went out; and I heard his gig drive off, over the damp road.

I was left alone with the two dying creatures.

My dog Paf had lain down in front of the empty hearth and this reminded me that a little fire would be good for us all. I therefore went out to seek for wood and straw, and soon a bright flame lit up the whole room, and the bed of the sick child, who was again gasping for breath.

I sat down, and stretched out my legs in front of the fire.

The rain was beating against the window panes, the wind rattled over the roof. I heard the short, hard, wheezing breath of the two patients, and the breathing of my dog who sighed with pleasure, curled up before the bright fireplace.

Life! life! what is it? These two unhappy creatures, who had always slept on straw, eaten black bread, suffered every kind of misery, were about to die! What had they done? The father was dead, the son was dead. The poor souls had always passed for honest folk, had been liked and esteemed as simple and worthy fellows!

I watched my steaming boots and my sleeping dog, and there arose within me a shameful and sensual pleasure, as I compared my lot with that of these slaves.

The little girl seemed to choke, and suddenly the grating sound became an intolerable suffering to me, lacerating me like a dagger, which at each stroke penetrated my heart.

I went toward her:

"Will you drink?" I said.

She moved her head to say yes, and I poured a few drops of water down her throat, but she could not swallow them.

The mother, who was quieter, had turned round to look at her child; and all at once a feeling of dread took possession of me, a sinister dread that passed over me, like the touch of some invisible monster. Where was I? I no longer knew! Was I dreaming? What horrible nightmare was this?

Is it true that such things happen—that one dies like this? And I glanced into all the dark corners of the cottage, as though I expected to see crouching in some obscure angle a hideous, unmentionable, terrifying thing, the thing which lies in wait for the lives of men, and kills, devours, crushes, strangles them; the thing that delights in red blood, eyes glistening

with fever, wrinkles and scars, white hair and decay.

The fire was dying out. I threw some more wood on it, and warmed my back, shuddering in every limb. At least, I hoped to die in a good room, with doctors around my bed and medicines on the tables! And these people had been all alone for twenty-four hours in this wretched hovel, without a fire, stretched on the straw with the death rattle in their throats! At last I heard the trot of a horse and the sounds of wheels; and the nurse came in coolly, pleased at finding some work to do, and showing little surprise at the sight of such misery.

I left her some money and fled with my dog; I fled like a malefactor, running away in the rain, with the rattle of those two throats still ringing in my ears,—running toward my warm home where my servants were awaiting me and preparing my good dinner.

But I shall never forget that scene, nor many other dreadful things that make me loathe this world.

What would I not give at times to be allowed not to think, not to feel, to live like a brute in a warm, clear atmosphere, in a country mellow with golden light, devoid of the raw, crude tones of verdure, a country of the East where I might sleep without weariness and wake without care, where restlessness is not anxiety, where love is free from anguish, and existence is not a burden?

I should choose there a large square dwelling, like a huge box sparkling in the sun.

From the terrace, I should look upon the sea and the white wing-like pointed sails of the Greek and Turkish boats, as they flit to and fro. The outer

walls have hardly any apertures. A large garden with air heavily laden under the overshadowing palm-trees, forms the center of this Oriental home. Sprays of clear water shoot up under the trees and fall back again with a slight splash, into a broad marble fountain sanded with golden dust. Here I should bathe often, between two pipes, two dreams, or two kisses.

I should have slaves, black and handsome, draped in light, airy clothing, noiselessly running hither and thither over the heavy carpets.

My walls should be soft and rebounding with the round contours of a woman's bosom, and on the divans encircling each room, numberless cushions of every shape should permit of my reposing in every conceivable attitude.

Then, when I should tire of my delicious repose, of my immobility, of my eternal daydream, satiated with the calm enjoyment of my own well-being, then, I would order a horse to be brought to my door—a horse black or white, as fleet as a gazelle.

And I would spring upon his back, and in a furious gallop, quaff the tingling intoxicating air. I would dart like an arrow over the glowing country, which fills the eye with delight and has all the bouquet of wine.

In the calm hour of eve, I would fly in a mad career toward the vast horizon dyed rose color in the setting sun. Out there, all becomes rose in the twilight: the sunburned mountains, the sand, the garments of the Arabs, the dromedaries, the horses, the tents! The rose-colored flamingoes fly upward from the marshes to the rose-colored sky, and I should

scream with delight, plunged in the boundless infinite rosiness of all that surrounds me.

I should be released from the sight of the streets and the deafening noise of cabs on the pavement, from the sight of black-coated men, seated on uncomfortable chairs, as they sip their absinthe and talk over business.

I should ignore the state of the money market, political events, changes of ministry, all the useless frivolities on which we squander our short and vapid existence. Why should I undergo these worries, these sufferings, these struggles? I would rest sheltered from the wind in my bright and sumptuous dwelling.

The winged dream was floating before my closed eyelids, and over my mind as it sank to rest, when I heard my men awakening, lighting the boat's lantern, and setting to work at some arduous and lengthy task.

I called out to them:

"What on earth are you doing?"

Raymond replied in a hesitating voice:

"We are getting some lines ready, sir; for we thought that you would like to fish, if it was fine enough at sunrise."

Agay is, during the summer, the rendezvous of all the fishermen along the coast. Whole families come there, sleeping at the inn or in the boats, eating *bouillabaisse* on the beach, under the shade of the pine-trees, the resinous bark of which crackles in the sun.

I inquired:

"What o'clock is it?"

"Three o'clock, sir."

Then, without rising, I stretched out my arm, and opened the door that separated my room from the forecastle.

The two men were squatting in the low den through which the mast passes in fitting into the step; the den was full of such strange and odd things that one might take it for a haunt of thieves; in perfect order along the partitions, instruments of all kinds were suspended: saws, axes, marline spikes, pieces of rigging, and saucepans; on the floor between the two berths, a pail, a stove, a barrel with its copper circles, glistening under the immediate ray of light from the lantern which hangs between the anchor bitts, by the side of the cable tiers; and my men were busy, baiting the innumerable hooks hanging all along the fishing lines.

"At what hour must I get up?" I asked.

"Why, now, sir, at once."

Half an hour after, we all three embarked on board the dingy, and left the "Bel-Ami" to go and spread our net at the foot of the Drammont, near the Île d'Or.

Then when our line, some two or three hundred yards long, had sunk to the bottom, we baited three little deep-sea lines, and having anchored the boat by sinking a stone at the end of a rope, we began to fish.

It was already daylight, and I could distinctly see the coast of Saint-Raphaël, near the mouth of the Argens, and the somber mountains of the Maures, themselves running out seaward till they came to an end, far away in the open sea, beyond the Gulf of Saint-Tropez.

Of all the southern coast, this is the spot I am fondest of. I love it as though I had been born there, as though I had grown up in it, because it is wild and glowing, and because the Parisian, the Englishman, the American, the man of fashion, and the adventurer have not yet poisoned it.

Suddenly the line I held in my hand quivered, I started, then felt nothing, and again a slight shock tightened the line wound round my finger, then another one more violent shook my whole hand, and with beating heart, I began to draw in the line, gently, eagerly, striving to peer through the transparent blue water, and soon I perceived in the shadow of the boat, a white flash describing rapid circles.

The fish thus seen appeared to me enormous, and when on board it was no bigger than a sardine.

Then I caught many others, blue, red, yellow, green, glittering, silvery, striped, golden, speckled, spotted, those pretty rock fish of the Mediterranean, so varied, so colored, that seem painted to please the eye; then sea-urchins covered with prickles, and those hideous monsters of the sea, conger-eels.

Nothing can be more amusing than the uplifting of a sea fishing line. What will come out of the sea? What surprise, what pleasure, or what disappointment at each hook pulled out of the water! What a thrill runs through one when from afar some large creature is perceived struggling, as it rises slowly toward us!

At ten o'clock we had returned on board the yacht, and the two men beaming with delight, informed me that our take weighed twenty-three pounds.

I was, however, doomed to pay dearly for my

sleepless night! A sick headache, the dreadful pain that racks in a way no torture could equal, shatters the head, drives one crazy, bewilders the ideas, and scatters the memory like dust before the wind; a sick headache had laid hold of me, and I was perforce obliged to lie down in my bunk with a bottle of ether under my nostrils.

After a few minutes, I fancied I heard a vague murmur which soon became a kind of buzzing, and it seemed as if all the interior of my body became light, as light as air, as though it were melting into vapor.

Then followed a numbness of spirit, a drowsy, comfortable state, in spite of the persisting pain, which, however, ceased to be acute. It was now a pain which one could consent to bear, and not any longer the terrible tearing agony, against which the whole tortured body rises in protest.

Soon the strange and delightful sensation of vacuum I had in my chest extended and reached my limbs, which in their turn became light, light as though flesh and bone had melted away and skin only remained; just enough skin to permit of my feeling the sweetness of life, and enjoy my repose. Now I found that I no longer suffered. Pain had disappeared, melted, vanished into air. And I heard voices, four voices, two dialogues, without understanding the words. At times they were but indistinct sounds, at other times a word or two reached me. But I soon recognized that these were but the accentuated buzzing of my own ears. I was not sleeping, I was awake, I understood, I felt, I reasoned with a clearness, a penetration, and power which were quite

extraordinary; and a joyousness of spirit, a strange intoxication, produced by the tenfold increase of my mental faculties.

It was not a dream like that created by *hasheesh*, nor the sickly visions produced by opium; it was a prodigious keenness of reasoning, a new manner of seeing, of judging, of estimating things and life, with the absolute consciousness, the certitude that this manner was the true one.

And the old simile of the Scriptures suddenly came back to my mind. It seemed to me that I had tasted of the tree of life, that all mystery was unveiled, so strongly did I feel the power of this new, strange, and irrefutable logic. And numberless arguments, reasonings, proofs, rosè up in my mind, to be, however, immediately upset by some proof, some reasoning, some argument yet more powerful. My brain had become a battle-field of ideas. I was a superior being, armed with an invincible intelligence, and I enjoyed prodigious happiness in the sensation of my power.

This state lasted a long, long time. I still inhaled the fumes of my ether bottle. Suddenly, I perceived that it was empty. And I again began to suffer.

For ten hours I endured this torture for which there is no remedy, then I fell asleep, and the next day, brisk as after convalescence, having written these few pages I left for Saint-Raphaël.

IV.

SAINT-RAPHAËL

ON OUR way here the weather was delightful, and a light breeze carried us over in six tacks. After rounding the Drammont, I caught sight of the villas of Saint-Raphaël hidden among the pine-trees, among the little slender pines beaten all the year round by the everlasting gusts of wind from Fréjus. Then I passed between the Lions, pretty red rocks that seemed to guard the town, and I entered the port which, choked up with sand at the further end, obliges one to remain some fifty yards off the quay. I then went on land.

A large crowd was gathered in front of the church. Some one was being married. A priest was performing in Latin, with pontifical gravity, the solemn and comical act which so disturbs mankind, bringing with it so much mirth, suffering, and tears. According to custom, the families had invited all their relatives and friends to the funeral service of a young girl's inno-

cence, to listen to the piously indecorous ecclesiastical admonitions, preceding those of the mother, and to the public benediction, bestowed on that which is otherwise so carefully veiled.

And the whole countryside, full of broad jokes, moved by the greedy and idle curiosity that draws the common herd to such a scene, had come there to see how the bride and bridegroom would comport themselves. I mingled with the crowd, and watched it.

Good heavens, how ugly men are! For at least the hundredth time I noticed, in the midst of this festive scene, that, of all races, the human race is the most hideous. The whole air was pervaded by the odor of the people, the nauseous, sickening odor of unclean bodies, greasy hair, and garlic, that odor of garlic, exhaled by the people of the south, through nose, mouth, and skin, just as roses spread abroad their perfume.

Certainly men are every day as ugly and smell as obnoxious, but our eyes, accustomed to the sight of them, our nostrils, used to their odor, fail to distinguish their ugliness and their emanations, unless we have been spared for some time the sight and odor of them.

Mankind is hideous! To obtain a gallery of grotesque figures, fit to raise a laugh from the dead, it would be sufficient to take the ten first-comers, set them in a line, and photograph them with their irregular heights, their legs, either too long or too short, their bodies too fat or too thin, their red or pale, bearded or smooth faces, their smirking or solemn looks.

Formerly, in primeval days, the wild man, the strong, naked man, was certainly as handsome as the horse, the stag, or the lion. The exercise of his muscles, a life free from restraint, the constant use of his vigor and his agility, kept up in him a grace of motion, which is the first condition of beauty, and an elegance of form, which is produced only by physical exercise. Later on, the artistic nations, enamored of form, knew how to preserve this grace and this elegance in intelligent man by the artificial means of gymnastics. The care bestowed on the body, the trials of strength and suppleness, the use of ice-cold water and vapor baths, made the Greeks true models of human beauty, and they have left us their statues to show us what were the bodies of these great artists.

But now, O Apollo! Look at the human race moving about in its festive scenes. The children rickety from the cradle, deformed by premature study, stupefied by the school life that wears out the body at fifteen years of age and cramps the mind before it is formed, reach adolescence with limbs badly grown, badly jointed, in which all normal proportions have completely disappeared.

And let us contemplate the people in the street, trotting along in their dirty clothing! As for the peasant! Good heavens! Let us go and watch the peasant in the fields, his gnarled, knotted frame, lanky, twisted, bent, more hideous than the barbarous types exhibited in a museum of anthropology.

In comparison how splendid are those men of bronze, the negroes; in shape, if not in face; how elegant, both in their movements and their figure, the

tall, lithe Arabs. Moreover, I have yet another reason for having a horror of crowds.

I cannot go into a theater, nor be present at any public entertainment. I at once experience a curious and unbearable feeling of discomfort, a horrible unnerving sensation, as though I were struggling with all my might against a mysterious and irresistible influence. And in truth, I struggle with the spirit of the mob, which strives to take possession of me.

How often have I observed that the intelligence expands and grows loftier when we live alone, and that it becomes meaner and lower when we again mix among other men. The contact, the opinions floating in the air, all that is said, all that one is compelled to listen to, to hear, to answer, acts upon the mind. A flow and ebb of ideas goes from head to head, from house to house, from street to street, from town to town, from nation to nation, and a level is established, an average of intellect is created by all large agglomerations of individuals.

The inherent qualities of intellectual initiative, of free will, of wise reflection, and even of sagacity, belonging to any individual being, generally disappear the moment that being is brought in contact with a large number of other beings.

The following is a passage from a letter of Lord Chesterfield to his son (1751) which sets forth with rare humility, the sudden elimination of all active qualities of the mind in every large body of people:

"Lord Macclesfield, who had the greatest share in forming the bill, and who is one of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers in Europe, spoke afterward with infinite knowledge, and all the clearness that so intricate a matter would admit of, but as his words, his

periods, and his utterance were not near so good as mine, the preference was most unanimously, though most unjustly, given to me.

"This will ever be the case; every numerous assembly is a *mob*, let the individuals who compose it be what they will. Mere reason and good sense is never to be talked to a mob; their passions, their sentiments, their senses, and their seeming interests, are alone to be applied to.

"Understanding they have collectively none, etc. . . ."

This deep observation of Lord Chesterfield, a remark, however, that has often been made, and noted with interest by philosophers of the scientific school, constitutes one of the most serious arguments against representative government.

The same phenomenon, a surprising one, is produced each time a large number of men are gathered together. All these persons, side by side, distinct from each other, of different minds, intelligences, passions, education, beliefs, and prejudices, become suddenly, by the sole fact of their being assembled together, a special being, endowed with a new soul, a new manner of thinking in common, which is the unanalyzable resultant of the average of these individual opinions.

It is a crowd, and that crowd is a person, one vast collective individual, as distinct from any other mob as one man is distinct from any other man.

A popular saying asserts that "the mob does not reason." Now why does not the mob reason, since each particular individual in the crowd does reason? Why should a crowd do spontaneously what none of the units of the crowd would have done? Why has a crowd irresistible impulses, ferocious wills, stupid enthusiasms that nothing can arrest, and, carried

away by these thoughtless impulses, why does it commit acts that none of the individuals composing it would commit alone?

A stranger utters a cry, and behold! a sort of frenzy takes possession of all, and all, with the same impulse, which no one tries to resist, carried away by the same thought, which instantaneously becomes common to all, notwithstanding different castes, opinions, beliefs, and customs, will fall upon a man, murder him, drown him, without a motive, almost without a pretext, whereas each one of them, had he been alone, would have rushed, at the risk of his life, to save the man he is now killing.

And in the evening, each one on returning home, will ask himself what passion or what madness had seized him and thrown his nature and his temperament out of its ordinary groove; how he could have given way to this savage impulse?

The fact is, he had ceased to be a man, to become one of a crowd. His personal will had become blended with the common will, as a drop of water is blended with and lost in a river.

His personality had disappeared, had become an infinitesimal particle of one vast and strange personality, that of the crowd. The panics which take hold of an army, the storms of opinion which carry away an entire nation, the frenzy of dervish dances, are striking examples of this identical phenomenon.

In short, it is not more surprising to see an agglomeration of individuals make one whole than to see molecules, that are placed near each other, form one body.

To this mysterious attraction must without doubt

be attributed the peculiar temperament of theater audiences, and the strange difference of judgment that exists between the audience of general rehearsals and that of the audience of first representations, and again between the audience of a first representation and that of the succeeding performances, and the change in the telling effects, from one evening to another; and the errors of judgment condemning a play like "Carmen," which, later on, turns out an immense success.

What I say about crowds must be applied to all society, and he who would carefully preserve the absolute integrity of his thought, the proud independence of his opinion, and look at life, humanity, and the universe as an impartial observer free from prejudice, preconceived belief and fear, must absolutely live apart from all social relations; for human stupidity is so contagious that he will be unable to frequent his fellow-creatures, even see them, or listen to them, without being, in spite of himself, influenced on all sides by their conversations, their ideas, their superstitions, their traditions, their prejudices, which by their customs, laws, and surprisingly hypocritical and cowardly code of morality, will surely contaminate him.

Those who strive to resist these lowering and incessant influences, struggle in vain amid petty, irresistible, innumerable, and almost imperceptible fetters; and through sheer fatigue soon cease to fight.

But a backward movement took place in the crowd; the newly-married couple were coming out. And immediately I followed the general example, raised myself on tiptoe to see,—and longed to see,

—with a stupid, low, repugnant longing, the longing of the common herd. The curiosity of my neighbors had intoxicated me; I was one of a crowd.

To fill up the remainder of the day, I decided on taking a row in my dingy up the Argens. This lovely and almost unknown river separates the plains of Fréjus from the wild mountain range of the Maures.

I took Raymond, who rowed me along the side of the low beach to the mouth of the river, which we found impracticable and partly filled up with sand. One channel only communicated with the sea; but so rapid, so full of foam, of eddies, and of whirlpools, that we were unable to ascend it.

We were therefore obliged to drag the boat to land and carry it over the sand-hills to a kind of beautiful lake, formed by the Argens at this spot.

In the midst of a green and marshy country, of that rich green tint given by trees growing out of water, the river sinks down between two banks, so covered with verdure, and with such high impenetrable foliage, that the neighboring mountains are barely visible; it sinks down, still winding, still looking like a peaceful lake, without showing or betraying that it continues twisting its way through the calm, lonesome, and magnificent country.

As in the low northern plains, where the springs ooze out under the feet, running over and vivifying the earth like blood, the clear, cold blood of the soil, so here we find again the same strange sensation of exuberant nature which floats over all damp countries.

Birds, with long legs dangling as they fly, spring up from among the reeds, stretching their pointed beaks heavenward; while others, broad-winged and

slow, pass from one bank to another with heavy flight, and others, smaller and more rapid, skim along the surface of the river, darting forward like rebounding pebbles. Innumerable turtledoves cooing on the heights, or wheeling about, fly from tree to tree, and seem to exchange messages of love. One feels a sensation that all around this deep water, throughout all this plain, up to the foot of the mountains, there is yet more water; the deceitful water of the marsh, sleeping yet living; broad, clear sheets, in which the skies are mirrored, over which the clouds flit by; in which, widely scattered, all manner of strange rushes spring up; the fertile limpid water, full of rotting life and deathly fermentation; water breeding fever and miasma, at the same time food and poison, spreading itself out in attractive loveliness over the mysterious mass of putrefaction beneath it. The atmosphere is delightful, relaxing, and dangerous. Over all the banks which separate the vast still pools, amid all the thick grasses, swarms, crawls, jumps, and creeps a whole world of slimy, repugnant, cold-blooded animals. I love those cold, subtle animals that are generally avoided and dreaded; for me there is something sacred about them.

At the hour of sunset the marsh intoxicates and excites me. After having been all day a silent pond lying hushed in the heat, it becomes at the moment of twilight a fairy-like and enchanted country. In its calm and boundless depths the skies are mirrored: skies of gold, skies of blood, skies of fire; they sink in it, bathe in it, float, and are drowned in it. They are there up above, in the immensity of the firmament, and they are there below, beneath us, so near

and yet so completely beyond our touch, in that shallow pool, through which the pointed grasses push their way like bristling hairs. All the color with which earth has been endowed, charming, varied, and enthralling, appears to us deliciously painted, admirably resplendent, and infinitely shaded around a single leaf of the water-lily. Every shade of red, rose, yellow, blue, green, and violet are there, in a little patch of water which shows us the heavens, and space, and dreamland, and the flight of the birds as they skim across its face. And then there is still something else—I know not what—in the marshes beheld in the setting sun. I feel therein a confused revelation of some unknown mystery, an original breath of primeval life, which is, perhaps, nothing more than the bubble of gas rising from a swamp at the fall of day.

V.

SAINT-TROPEZ

WE LEFT Saint Raphaël at about eight o'clock this morning, with a strong northwest breeze.

The sea in the gulf, though it had no waves, was white with foam, white like a mass of soapsuds, for the wind, the terrible wind from Fréjus which blows almost every morning, seemed to throw itself on the water as though it would tear it to pieces, raising a rolling mass of little waves of froth, scattered one moment, reformed the next.

The people at the port having assured us that this squall would fall toward eleven o'clock, we decided upon starting with three reefs in and the storm-jib. The dingy was placed on board at the foot of the mast, and the "Bel-Ami" seemed to fly directly it left the jetty. Although it carried scarcely any sail, I had never felt it dash along like this. One might have thought that it hardly touched the water, and one would never have suspected that it carried at the bottom of its large keel, two and a half yards deep,

a slab of lead weighing over thirty hundredweight, besides thirty-eight hundredweight of ballast in its hold, and all we had on board in the shape of rigging, anchors, chains, cables, and furniture.

I had soon crossed the bay, at the further end of which the Argens throws itself into the sea; and as soon as I was under shelter of the coast the breeze completely fell. It is there that the splendid, somber, and wild region begins, which is still called the land of the Moors. It is a long peninsula, composed of mountains, with a contour of coast over sixty miles long.

Saint-Tropez, situated at the entry of the lovely gulf, formerly called Gulf of Grimaud, is the capital of the little Saracen kingdom, of which nearly every village, built on the summit of a peak in order to secure it from attack, is still full of Moorish houses with arcades, narrow windows, and inner courtyards, wherein tall palm-trees have grown up and are now higher than the roofs.

If one penetrates on foot into the unknown valleys of this strange group of mountains, one discovers an incredible country, devoid of roads and lanes; without even footpaths, without hamlets, without houses.

At intervals, after seven or eight hours' walking, appears a hovel, often abandoned, or sometimes inhabited by a poverty-stricken family of charcoal burners.

The Monts des Maures have, it appears, a system of geology peculiar to themselves, a matchless flora said to be the most varied in Europe, and immense forests of pines, chestnuts, and cork-trees.

Some three years ago, I made an excursion into

the very heart of the country to the ruins of the *Chartreuse de la Verne,* and have retained an ineffaceable recollection of it. If it is fine to-morrow I shall return there.

A new road follows the sea, going from Saint-Raphaël to Saint-Tropez. All along this magnificent avenue, opened up through the forest by the side of a matchless beach, new winter resorts are being started. The first one planned is called Saint Aigulf.

This bears a peculiar stamp. In the midst of a forest of fir-trees stretching down to the sea, wide roads are laid out in every direction. There is not a house, nothing but the barely indicated plan of the streets, running through the trees. Here are the squares, the crossroads, and the boulevards. The names are even written up on metal tablets: Boulevard Ruysdaël, Boulevard Rubens, Boulevard Van Dyck, Boulevard Claude Lorrain. One wonders at all these painters' names. Why indeed? Simply because the *Company* has decided, like God before he lit the sun: "This shall be an artists' resort!"

The *Company!* No one knows in the rest of the world, all this word contains of hopes, dangers, money gained, and money lost on the Mediterranean shores! The *Company!* fatal and mysterious word, deep and deceitful!

In this instance, however, the *Company* seems to have realized its expectations, for it has already found purchasers, and of the best, among artists. At various places one reads:

"Building lot bought by M. Carolus Duran; another by M. Clairin, another by Mlle. Croizette, etc."

Nevertheless — who can tell? The Mediterranean Companies are not in luck just now. Nothing is more ludicrous than this fury of speculation, which generally ends in terrible failures. Whosoever has gained ten thousand francs (four hundred pounds) over his field, at once buys ten millions' (four hundred thousand pounds) worth of land at twenty sous (tenpence) the meter, in order to sell it again at twenty francs (sixteen shillings). Boulevards are traced, water is conveyed, gas-works are prepared, and the purchaser is hopefully expected.

The purchaser does not make his appearance, but instead of him — ruin.

Far off in front of me I perceive the towers and the buoys that mark the breakers on both sides, at the opening of the Gulf of Saint-Tropez.

The first tower is called "Tour des Sardinaux," and marks a regular shoal of rocks, level with the top of the water, some of which just show the tips of their brown heads; the second one has been christened "Balise de la Sèche à l'huile." *

We now reach the entrance of the gulf, which extends back between two ridges of mountains and forests as far as the village of Grimaud, built at the very extremity, on a height. The ancient castle of Grimaldi, a tall ruin that overlooks the village, appears in the distant haze like the evocation of some fairy scene.

The wind has fallen. The gulf looks like an immense calm lake, into which, taking advantage of the last puffs of the squall, we slowly make our way.

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* Buoy of the oily scuttle-fish!

To the right of the channel, Sainte-Maxime, a little white port, is mirrored in the water which reflects the houses topsy-turvy, and reproduces them as distinctly as on shore. Opposite, Saint-Tropez appears, guarded by an old fort.

At seven o'clock the "Bel-Ami" anchored at the quay, by the little steamboat which carries on the service with Saint-Raphaël. The only means of communication between this isolated little port and the rest of the world is by this "Lion de Mer," an old pleasure yacht, which runs in connection with a venerable diligence that carries the letters and travels at night by the one road which crosses the mountains.

This is one of those charming and simple daughters of the sea, one of those nice modest little towns, which, fed upon fish and sea air, and breeder of sailors, is as much a produce of the sea as any shell. On the jetty, stands a bronze statue of the Bailli de Suffren.

The pervading smell is one of fish and smoking tar, of brine and hulls. The stones in the streets glitter like pearls with the scales of the sardines, and along the walls of the port, a population of lame and paralyzed old sailors bask in the sun on the stone benches. From time to time they talk of past voyages, and of those they have known in bygone days, the grandfathers of the small boys running yonder. Their hands and faces are wrinkled, tanned, browned, dried by the wind, by fatigue, by the spray, by the heat of the tropics, and by the icy cold of northern seas, for they have seen, in their roamings over the ocean, the ins and outs of the world, every aspect of the earth and of all latitudes. In front of them, propped upon

a stick, passes and repasses the old captain of the merchant service, who formerly commanded the "Trois-Sœurs," or the "Deux-Amis," or the "Marie-Louise," or the "Jeune-Clémentine."

All salute him, like soldiers answering the roll-call, with a litany of "Good day, captain," modulated in many tones.

This is a true land of the sea, a brave little town, briny and courageous, which fought in days of yore against the Saracens, against the Duc d'Anjou, against the wild corsairs, against the Connétable de Bourbon, and Charles-Quint, and the Duc de Savoie, and the Duc d'Epernon. In 1637, the inhabitants, fathers of these peaceful citizens, without any assistance repelled the Spanish fleet, and every year they renew with surprising realism the representation of the attack and their defense, filling the town with noisy bustle and clamor, strangely recalling the great popular festivities of the Middle Ages.

In 1813, the town likewise repulsed an English flotilla, that had been sent against it.

Now it is a fishing town, and the produce of its fisheries supplies the greater part of the coast with tunny, sardines, *loups,* rock-lobsters, and all the pretty fish of this blue sea.

On setting foot on the quay after having dressed myself, I heard twelve o'clock strike, and I perceived two old clerks, notary's or lawyer's clerks, going off to their midday meal, like two old beasts of burden, unbridled for a few minutes while they eat their oats at the bottom of a nosebag.

Oh, liberty! liberty! our sole happiness, sole hope, sole dream! Of all the miserable creatures, of all

classes of individuals, of all orders of workers, of all the men who daily fight the hard battle of life, these are the most to be pitied, on these does Fortune bestow the fewest of her favors.

No one believes this,—no one knows it. They are powerless to complain; they cannot revolt; they remain gagged and bound in their misery, the shame-faced misery of quill-drivers.

They have gone through a course of study, they understand law, they have taken a degree, perhaps.

How dearly I like that dedication by Jules Vallès:

"To all those, who, nourished upon Greek and Latin, have died of starvation."

And what do they earn, these starvelings? Eight to fifteen hundred francs (thirty-two to sixty pounds) a year!

Clerks in gloomy chambers, or clerks in office, you should read every morning over the door of your fatal prison, Dante's famous phrase:

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!"

They are but twenty when they first enter, and will remain till sixty or longer. During this long period not an event takes place! Their whole life slips away in the dark little bureau, ever the same, carpeted with green portfolios. They enter young, at the age of vigorous hopes; they leave in old age, when death is at hand. All the harvest of recollections that we make in a lifetime, the unexpected events, our

loves,—gentle or tragic memories, our adventures, all the chances of a free existence, are unknown to these convicts.

The days, the weeks, the months, the seasons, the years, all are like. They begin the day's work at the same hour; at the same hour they breakfast; at the same hour they leave; and this goes on for sixty or seventy years. Four accidents only constitute landmarks in their existence: marriage, the birth of the firstborn, and the death of father or mother. Nothing else; stop though, yes, a rise in salary. They know nothing of ordinary life, nothing of the world! Unknown to them are the days of cheerful sunshine in the streets, and idle wanderings through the fields, for they are never released before the appointed hour. They become voluntary prisoners at eight o'clock in the morning, and at six the prison doors are opened for them, when night is at hand. But, as a compensation, they have, for a whole fortnight in the year, the right—a right indeed much discussed, hardly bargained for and grudgingly granted—to remain shut up in their lodgings. For where can they go without money?

The builder climbs skyward; the driver prowls about the streets; the railway mechanic traverses woods, mountains, plains; moves incessantly from the walls of the town to the vast blue horizon of the sea. The employee never quits his bureau, his coffin, and in the same little mirror, wherein he saw himself a young fellow with fair mustache the day of his arrival, he contemplates himself bald and white-bearded, on the day of his dismissal. Then, all is finished, life is played out, the future closed. How can he have

reached this point? How can he have grown old without any event having occurred, without having been shaken by any of the surprises of existence? It is so nevertheless. He must now make way for the young! for the young beginners!

Then the unfortunate mortal steals away, more wretched than before, and dies almost immediately from the sudden snapping of the long and obstinate habit of his daily routine, the dreary routine of the same movements, the same actions, the same tasks at the same hours.

As I went into the hotel for breakfast, an alarmingly big packet of letters and papers was handed to me, and my heart sank as at the prospect of some misfortune. I have a fear and a hatred of letters; they are bonds. Those little squares of paper bearing my name seem to give out a noise of chains, as I tear them open,—of chains linking me to living creatures I have known or know.

Each one inquires, although written by different hands: "Where are you? What are you doing? Why disappear in this way, without telling us where you are going? With whom are you hiding?" Another adds: "How can you expect people to care for you if you run away in this fashion from your friends? It is positively wounding to their feelings."

Well then, don't attach yourselves to me! Will no one endeavor to understand affection without joining thereto a notion of possession and of despotism. It would seem as if social ties could not exist without entailing obligations, susceptibilities, and a certain amount of subserviency. From the moment one has smiled upon the attentions of a stranger,

this stranger has a hold upon you, is inquisitive about your movements, and reproaches you with neglecting him. If we get as far as friendship, then each one imagines himself to have certain claims; intercourse becomes a duty, and the bonds which unite us seem to end in slipknots which draw tighter. This affectionate solicitude, this suspicious jealousy, eager to control and to cling, on the part of beings who have met casually and who fancy themselves linked together because they have proved to be mutually agreeable, arises solely from the harassing fear of solitude, which haunts mankind upon this earth.

Each of us, feeling the void around him, the unfathomable depth in which his heart beats, his thoughts struggle, wanders on like a madman with open arms and eager lips, seeking some other being to embrace. And embrace he does, to the right, to the left, at haphazard, without knowing, without looking, without understanding, that he may not feel alone. He seems to say, from the moment he has shaken hands: "Now, you belong to me a little. You owe me some part of yourself, of your life, of your thoughts, of your time." And that is why so many people believe themselves to be friends, who know nothing whatever of each other, so many start off hand in hand, heart to heart, without having really had one good look at one another. They must care for some one, in order not to be alone, their affections must be expended in friendship or in love, but some vent must be found for it incessantly. And they talk of affection, swear it, become enthusiastic over it, pour their whole heart into some unknown heart found only the evening before, all their soul into some

chance soul with a face that has pleased. And from this haste to become united, arise all the surprises, mistakes, misunderstandings, and dramas of life.

Just as we remain lonely and alone, notwithstanding all our efforts, so in like manner we remain free, notwithstanding all our ties.

No one ever belongs to another. Half unconsciously we lend ourselves to the comedy—coquettish or passionate—of possession, but no one really gives himself—his ego—to another human being. Man, exasperated by this imperious need to be the master of some one, instituted tyranny, slavery, and marriage. He can kill, torture, imprison, but the human will inevitably escapes him, even when it has for a few moments consented to submission.

Do mothers even possess their children? Does not the tiny being but just entered into the world set to work to cry for what he wants, to announce his separate existence, and proclaim his independence?

Does a woman ever really belong to you? Do you know what she thinks, whether even she really adores you? You kiss her sweet body (waste your whole soul on her perfect lips): a word from your mouth or from hers—one single word—is enough to put between you a gulf of implacable hatred!

All sentiments of affection lose their charm when they become authoritative. Because it gives me pleasure to see and talk with some one, does it follow that I should be permitted to know what he does, and what he likes? The bustle of towns, both great and small, of all classes of society, the mischievous, envious, evil-speaking, calumniating curiosity, the in-

cessant watchfulness of the affections and conduct of others, of their gossip and their scandals, are they not all born of that pretension we have to control the conduct of others, as if we all belonged to each other in varying degrees? And we do in fact imagine that we have some rights over them and over their life, for we would fain model it upon our own; over their thoughts, for we expect them to be of the same style as our own; over their opinions, in which we will not tolerate any difference from ours; over their reputation, for we expect it to conform to our principles; over their habits, for we swell with indignation when they are not according to our notions of morality.

I was breakfasting at the end of a long table in the Hotel Bailli de Suffren, and still occupied with the perusal of my letters and papers, when I was disturbed by the noisy conversation of some half-dozen men, seated at the other end.

They were commercial travelers. They talked on every subject with assurance, with contempt, in an airy, chaffing, authoritative manner, and they gave me the clearest, the sharpest feeling of what constitutes the true French spirit; that is to say, the average of the intelligence, logic, sense, and wit of France. One of them, a great fellow with a shock of red hair, wore the military medal, and also one for saving life—a fine fellow. Another, a fat little roundabout, made puns without ceasing and laughed till his sides ached at his own jokes, before he would leave time to the others to understand his fun. Another man, with close-cut hair, was reorganizing the army and the administration of justice, reforming the laws and the

constitution, sketching out an ideal republic to suit his own views, as a traveler in the wine trade. Two others, side by side, were amusing each other thoroughly with the narrative of their *bonnes fortunes;* adventures in back parlors of shops and conquests of maids-of-all-work.

And in them I saw France personified, the witty, versatile, brave, and gallant France of tradition.

These men were types of the race, vulgar types, it is true, but which have but to be poetized a little to find in them the Frenchman such as history —that lying and imaginative old dame—shows him to us.

And it is really an amusing race, by reason of certain very special qualities which one finds absolutely nowhere else.

First and foremost it is their versatility which so agreeably diversifies both their customs and their institutions. It is this which makes the history of their country resemble some surprising tale of adventure in a *feuilleton,* of which the pages, "to be continued in the next number," are full of the most unexpected events, tragic, comic, terrible, grotesque. One may be angry or indignant over it, according to one's way of thinking, but it is none the less certain that no history in the world is more amusing and more stirring than theirs.

From the pure art point of view—and why should one not admit this special and disinterested point of view, in politics as well as in literature?—it remains without a rival. What can be more curious, and more surprising, than the events which have been accomplished in the last century?

What will to-morrow bring forth? This expectation of the unforeseen is, after all, very charming. Everything is possible in France, even the most wildly improbable drolleries, and the most tragic adventures.

What could surprise them? When a country has produced a Joan of Arc and a Napoleon, it may well be considered miraculous ground.

And then the French love women: they love them well, with passion and with airy grace, and with respect.

Their gallantry cannot be compared to anything in any other country.

He who has preserved in his heart the flame of gallantry which burned in the last centuries surrounds women with a tenderness at once profound, gentle, sensitive, and vigilant. He loves everything that belongs to them; everything that comes from them; everything that they are; everything they do. He loves their toilette, their knickknacks, their adornments, their artifices, their *naïvetés,* their little perfidies, their lies, and their dainty ways. He loves them all, rich as well as poor, the young and even the old, the dark, the fair, the fat, the thin. He feels himself at his ease with them, and among them. There he could remain indefinitely, without fatigue, without *ennui,* happy in the mere fact of being in their presence.

He knows how, from the very first word, by a look, by a smile, to show them that he adores them, to arouse their attention, to sharpen their wish to please, to display for his benefit all their powers of seduction. Between them and him there is established

at once a quick sympathy, a fellowship of instincts, almost a relationship through similarity of character and nature. Then begins a combat of coquetry and gallantry; a mysterious and skirmishing sort of friendship is cemented and an obscure affinity of heart and mind is drawn closer.

He knows how to say what will please them, how to make them understand what he thinks; how to make known without ever shocking them, without offending their delicate and watchful modesty, the admiration, discreet yet ardent, always burning in his eyes, always trembling on his lips, always alight in his veins. He is their friend and their slave, the humble servitor of their caprices, and the admirer of their persons. He is ever at their beck and call, ready to help them, to defend them, as a secret ally. He would love to devote himself to them, not only to those he knows slightly but to those he knows not at all, to those he has never seen.

He asks nothing of them but a little pretty affection, a little confidence, or a little interest, a little graceful friendliness or even sly malice.

He loves in the street the woman who passes by, and whose glance falls upon him. He loves the young girl with hair streaming down her shoulders, who, a blue bow on her head, a flower in her bosom, moves with slow or hurried step, timid or bold eye, through the throng on the pavements. He loves the unknown ones he elbows, the little shopwoman who dreams on her doorstep, the fine lady who lazily reclines in her open carriage.

From the moment he finds himself face to face with a woman, his heart is stirred, and his best

powers are awakened. He thinks of her, talks for her, tries to please her, and to let her understand that she pleases him. Tender expressions hover on his lips, caresses in his glance; he is invaded by a longing to kiss her hand, to touch even the stuff of her dress. For him it is women who adorn the world and make life seductive.

He likes to sit at their feet, for the mere pleasure of being there; he likes to meet their eye, merely to catch a glimpse of their veiled and fleeting thoughts; he likes to listen to their voice, solely because it is the voice of woman.

It is by them, and for them, that the Frenchman has learned to talk and to display the ready wit which distinguishes him.

To talk! What is it? It is the art of never seeming wearisome, of knowing how to invest every trifle with interest, to charm no matter what be the subject, to fascinate with absolutely nothing.

How can one describe the airy butterfly touch upon things by supple words, the running fire of wit, the dainty flitting of ideas, which should all go to compose talk?

The Frenchman is the only being in the world who has this subtle spirit of wit, and he alone thoroughly enjoys and comprehends it.

His wit is a mere flash and yet it dwells; now the current joke, now the wit, which illumines the national literature.

That which is truly innate is wit, in the largest sense of the word, that vast breath of irony or gaiety which has animated the nation from the moment it could think or speak: it is the pungent raciness of

Montaigne and Rabelais, the irony of Voltaire, of Beaumarchais, of Saint-Simon, and the inextinguishable laughter of Molière.

The brilliant sally, the neat epigram, is the small-change of this wit. And nevertheless it is an aspect of it, a characteristic peculiarity of the national intelligence. It is one of its keenest charms. It is this that makes the sceptical gaiety of Paris life, the careless cheerfulness of their manners and customs. It is part and parcel of the social amenity.

Formerly, these pleasant jests were made in verse, nowadays they appear in prose. They are called, according to their date, epigrams, *bons mots*, traits, hits, *gauloiseries*. They fly through town and drawing-room, they spring up everywhere, on the boulevard as well as in Montmartre. And those of Montmartre are often just as good as those of the boulevard; they are printed in the papers; from one end of France to the other they excite laughter. For, at least, the French know how to laugh.

Why should one good thing more than another, the unexpected, quaint juxtaposition of two terms, two ideas, or even two sounds, a ridiculous pun or some unexpected cock-and-bull story, open the flood-gates of our gaiety, and cause explosions of mirth, fit to blow up all Paris and the provinces like a mine?

Why do all the French laugh, while all the English and all the Germans can understand nothing of the fun? Why? Solely and wholly because they are French, because they possess the intelligence which is peculiar to the French, and because they possess the delightful, enviable gift of laughter.

With them, moreover, a little mother-wit enables any government to hold its own.

Good spirits take the place of genius, a neat saying consecrates a man at once and makes him great for all posterity. The rest matters little. The nation loves those who amuse it, and forgives everything to those who can make it laugh.

A glance thrown over the past history of France will make us understand that the fame of their great men has only been made by flashes of wit. The most detestable princes have become popular by agreeable jests, repeated and remembered from century to century.

The throne of France is maintained by the cap and bells of the jester.

Jests, jests, nothing but jests, ironic or heroic, polished or coarse,—jests float forever to the surface in their history, and make it like nothing so much as a collection of puns and witticisms.

Clovis, the Christian king, cried on hearing the story of the Passion:

"Why was I not there with my Franks?" This prince, in order to reign alone, massacred his allies and his relations, and committed every crime imaginable. Nevertheless, he is looked upon as a pious and civilizing monarch.

"Why was I not there with my Franks?"

We should know nothing of good King Dagobert, if the song had not apprised us of a few particulars, no doubt erroneous, of his existence.

Pepin, wishing to remove the king Childeric from the throne, proposed to Pope Zacharias the following insidious question:

"Which of the two is the more worthy to reign: He who worthily fulfills all the kingly functions without the title, or he who bears the title without knowing how to reign?"

What do we know of Louis VI.? Nothing. Pardon! In the battle of Brenneville, when an Englishman laid hands upon him, crying, "The king is taken," this truly French monarch replied: "Do you know, knave, that a king can never be taken, even at chess?"

Louis IX., saint though he was, has not left a single good saying to remember him by. In consequence, his reign appears to the French a wearisome episode, full of orisons and penances.

That noodle, Philip VI., beaten and wounded at the battle of Crécy, cried as he knocked at the gates of the castle of Arbroie: "Open: here are the fortunes of France!" They are still grateful to him for this melodramatic speech. John II., made prisoner by the Prince of Wales, remarks with chivalrous goodwill and the graceful gallantry of a French troubadour: "I had counted upon entertaining you at supper tonight; but fortune wills otherwise, and ordains that I should sup with you."

It would be impossible to bear adversity more gracefully.

"It is not for the King of France to avenge the quarrels of the Duke of Orléans," was the generous declaration of Louis XII. And it is, truly, a kingly saying; one worthy of the remembrance of all princes.

That hare-brained fellow, Francis I., more apt at the pursuit of the fair sex than at the conduct of a campaign, saved his reputation and surrounded his

name with an imperishable halo by writing to his mother those few superb words, after the defeat of Pavia: "All is lost, Madame, save honor."

Does not that phrase remain to this day as good as a victory? Has it not made this prince more illustrious than the conquest of a kingdom? We have forgotten the names of the greater number of the famous battles fought in these long bygone days, but shall we ever forget: "All is lost, save honor?"

Henry IV.! Hats off, gentlemen! Here is the master! Sly, sceptical, tricky, deceitful beyond belief, artful beyond compare; a drunkard, debauchee, unbeliever, he managed by a few happy and pointed sayings to make for himself in history an admirable reputation as a chivalrous, generous king, a brave loyal, and honest man.

Oh! the cheat! well did he know how to play upon human stupidity!

"Hang yourself, brave Crillon, we have gained the day without you."

After a speech like this, a general is always ready to be hanged or killed for his master's sake.

At the opening of the famous battle of Ivry: "Children, if the colors fall, rally to my white plumes, you will find them always on the road to honor and victory."

How could a man fail to be victorious who knew how to speak thus to his captains and his troops?

This sceptical monarch wishes for Paris; he longs for it, but he must choose between his faith and the beautiful city: "Enough," he murmurs, "after all, Paris is well worth a mass!" And he changes his religion as he would have changed his coat. Is it

not a fact, however, that the witticism caused a ready acceptance of the deed? "Paris is well worth a mass," raised a laugh among the choicer spirits, and there was no violent indignation over the change.

Has he not become the patron of all fathers of families, by the question put to the Spanish ambassador, who found him playing at horses with the dauphin: "Are you a father, M. l'Ambassadeur?"

The Spaniard replied: "Yes, sire."

"In that case," said the king, "we will go on."

But he made a conquest for all eternity of the heart of France, of the *bourgeoisie,* and of the people, by the finest phrase that prince ever pronounced,—a real inspiration of genius, full of depth, heartiness, sharpness, and good sense.

"If God prolongs my life, I hope to see in my kingdom no peasant so poor that he cannot put a fowl in the pot for his Sunday's dinner."

It is with words such as these that enthusiastic and foolish crowds are flattered and governed. By a couple of clever sayings, Henry IV. has drawn his own portrait for posterity. One cannot pronounce his name without at once having a vision of the white plumes, and of the delicious flavor of a *poule-au-pot.*

Louis XIII. made no happy hits. This dull king had a dull reign.

Louis XIV. created the formula of absolute personal power: "The State is myself."

He gave the measure of royal pride in its fullest expansion: "I have almost had to wait."

He set the example of sonorous political phrases, which make alliances between two nations: "The Pyrenees exist no longer!"

All his reign is in these few phrases.

Louis XV., most corrupt of kings, elegant and witty, has bequeathed to posterity that delightful keynote of his supreme indifference: "After me, the deluge."

If Louis XVI. had inspired enough to perpetrate one witticism, he might possibly have saved his kingdom. With one *bon mot,* might he not perhaps have escaped the guillotine?

Napoleon I. scattered around him by handfuls the sayings that were suited to the hearts of his soldiers.

Napoleon III. extinguished with one brief phrase all the future indignation of the French nation in that first promise: "The Empire is peace." The Empire is peace! Superb declaration, magnificent lie! After having said that, he might declare war against the whole of Europe without having anything to fear from his people. He had found a simple, neat, and striking formula, capable of appealing to all minds, and against which facts would be no argument.

He made war against China, Mexico, Russia, Austria, against all the world. What did it matter? There are people yet who speak with sincere conviction of the eighteen years of tranquillity he gave to France: "The Empire is peace."

And it was also with his keen words of satire, phrases more mortal than bullets, that M. Rochefort laid the Empire low, riddling it with the arrows of his wit, cutting it to shreds and tatters.

Maréchal MacMahon himself has left as a souvenir of his career to power: "Here I am, here I remain!" And it was by a shaft from Gambetta that he was, in his turn, knocked down: "Submission or dismissal."

With these two words, more powerful than a revolution, more formidable than the barricades, more invincible than an army, more redoubtable than all the votes, the tribune turned out the soldier, crushed his glory, and destroyed his power and prestige.

As to those who govern France at this moment, they must fall, for they are devoid of wit; they will fall, for in the day of danger, in the day of disturbance, in the inevitable moment of seesaw, they will not be capable of making France laugh, and of disarming her.

Of all these historical phrases there are not ten really authentic. But what does it matter so long as they are believed to have been uttered by those to whom they are attributed:

"*Dans le pays des bossus*
Il faut l'être
Ou le paraître,"*

says the popular song.

Meanwhile the commercial travelers were talking of the emancipation of women, of their rights, and of the new position in society they longed for.

Some approved, others were annoyed; the little fat man jested without ceasing, and ended the breakfast, as well as the discussion, by the following entertaining anecdote:

"Lately," said he, "there was a great meeting in England, where this question was discussed. One of

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* "In the country of hunchbacks
One must be so,
Or at least appear so."

the orators had been setting forth numerous arguments in favor of the women's case, and wound up with this observation:

"'To conclude, gentlemen, I may observe that the difference between man and woman is after all, very small.'"

A powerful voice, from an enthusiastic and thoroughly convinced listener, arose from the audience, crying: "Hurrah for the small difference!"

VI.

The Chartreuse de la Verne

As it was remarkably fine this morning, I started for the Chartreuse de la Verne.

Two recollections draw me toward this ruin: that of the sensation of infinite solitude and the unforgettable melancholy of the deserted cloister, and also that of an old peasant couple, to whose cottage I had been taken the year before by a friend who was guiding me across this country of the Moors.

Seated in a country cart, for the road soon became impracticable for a vehicle on springs, I followed the line of the bay to its deepest point. I could see upon the opposite shore the pine woods where the "Company" is attempting to create another winter resort. The shore indeed is exquisite, and the whole country magnificent. Then the road plunges into the mountains and soon passes through the town of Cogolin. A little further on, I quitted it for a rough broken lane, which was scarcely more than a long rut. A river, or rather a

big stream, runs by the side, and every hundred yards or so cuts through the ravine, floods it, wanders away a little, returns, loses itself again, quits its bed, and drowns the track, then falls into a ditch, strays through a field of stones, appears suddenly to calm down into wisdom, and for a while follows its due course; but seized all at once by some wild fancy, it precipitates itself again into the road and changes it into a marsh, in which the horse sinks up to the breastplate and the high vehicle up to the driving seat.

There are no more houses, only from time to time, a charcoal burner's hut; the poorest live in absolute holes. Is it not almost incredible that men should inhabit holes in the ground, where they live all the year, cutting wood and burning it to extract the charcoal, eating bread and onions, drinking water, and sleeping like rabbits in their burrows, in narrow caverns hewn in the granite rock? Lately, too, in the midst of these unexplored valleys, a hermit has been discovered, a real hermit, hidden there for these thirty years, unknown to anyone, even to the forest rangers.

The existence of this wild man, revealed by I know not whom, was, no doubt, mentioned to the driver of the diligence, who spoke of it to the postmaster, who talked of it to the telegraph clerk, male or female, who flew with the wonder to the editor of some little local paper, who made out of it a sensational paragraph, copied into all the country journals of Provence.

The police set to work to hunt out the hermit, without apparently causing him any alarm, whence

we may conclude that he had kept all needful papers by him. But a photographer, excited by the news, set off in his turn, wandered three days and three nights among the mountains, and ended by photographing some one, the real hermit some say, an impostor, others will tell you.

Last year, then, the friend who first revealed to me this strangely quaint country, showed me two creatures infinitely more curious than the poor devil who had come to hide in these impenetrable woods a grief, a remorse, an incurable despair, or perhaps, simply the mere *ennui* of living.

This is how he first discovered them: Wandering on horseback among these valleys, he suddenly came across a prosperous farm: vines, fields, and a farmhouse, which looked comfortable though humble.

He entered. He was received by a woman, a peasant, about seventy years old. The husband, seated under a tree, rose and came forward to bow.

"He is deaf," she said.

He was a fine old fellow of eighty, amazingly strong, upright, and handsome. They had for servants a laborer, and a farm-girl. My friend a little surprised to meet these singular persons in the midst of a desert, inquired about them. They had been there for a long time; they were much respected and passed for being comfortably off, that is, for peasants.

He came back several times to visit them, and little by little became the confidant of the wife. He brought her papers and books, being surprised to find that she had some ideas, or rather remains of ideas, which scarcely seemed those of her class. She was, however, neither well read, intelligent, nor witty, but there

seemed to be, in the depths of her memory, traces of forgotten thoughts, a slumbering recollection of a by-gone education. One day she asked him his name.

"I am the Count de X——," he said.

Moved by the obscure vanity which is lodged deep in all souls, she replied:

"I too am noble."

Then she went on, speaking certainly for the first time in her life of this piece of ancient history, unknown to anyone.

"I am the daughter of a colonel. My husband was a non-commissioned officer in my father's regiment. I fell in love with him and we ran away together."

"And you came here?"

"Yes, we hid ourselves."

"And you have never seen your family since?"

"Oh, no! don't you see my husband was a deserter."

"You have never written to anyone?"

'Oh, no!"

"And you have never heard anyone speak of your family, of your father, or mother?"

"Oh, no, mamma was dead."

This woman had preserved a certain childishness, the simplicity of those who throw themselves into love as over a precipice.

He asked again:

"You have never told this to anyone?"

She answered: "Oh, no! I can say it now, because Maurice is deaf. As long as he could hear, I should not have dared to mention it. Besides, I have

never seen anyone but the peasants since I ran away."

"At least, then, you have been happy?"

"Oh, yes, very happy. I have been very happy I have never regretted anything."

Well, I also had gone last year to visit this woman, this couple, as one goes to gaze at some miraculous relic.

I had contemplated with surprise, sadness, and even a little disgust, this woman who had followed this man, this rustic Adonis, attracted by his hussar uniform, and who had continued to see him under his peasant's rags, with the blue dolman slung over his back, sword at his side, and the high boot with clanking spur.

She had, however, become a peasant herself. In the depths of this wilderness, she had become perfectly accustomed to this life without luxuries, without charm, or delicacy of any sort, she had adapted herself to these simple manners. And she loved him still. She had become a woman of the people, in cap and coarse petticoat. Seated on a straw-bottomed chair at a wooden table, she ate a mess of cabbage, potatoes, and bacon from an earthenware plate. She slept on a straw mattress beside him.

She had never thought of anything but him! She had regretted neither ornaments, nor silks, nor elegance, nor soft chairs, nor the perfumed warmth of well-curtained rooms, nor repose in a comfortable bed. She had never needed anything but him! As long as he was there, she had wanted nothing else!

She was quite young when she abandoned life,

the world, and those who had brought her up and loved her. Alone with him she had come to this savage ravine. And he had been everything to her, everything that could be longed for, dreamed of, expected, ceaselessly hoped for. He had filled her life with happiness from one end to another. She could not have been happier.

Now I was going for the second time to see her again, filled with the surprise and the vague contempt with which she inspired me.

She lived near the Hyères road, on the opposite slope of the mountain on which stands the Chartreuse de la Verne, and another carriage was awaiting me on this road, for the deep track we had followed had now ceased and become a mere footpath, only accessible to pedestrians and mules.

I started therefore alone, on foot and with slow steps, to climb the mountains. I was in a delightful wood, a real Corsican thicket, a fairy-tale wood composed of flowering creepers, aromatic plants with powerful scents, and huge, magnificent trees.

The granite fragments in the track sparkled as they rolled beneath my steps, and in the openings between the branches, I saw sudden peeps of wide gloomy valleys full of verdure, winding lengthily away to the distance.

I was warm, the quick blood flowed within my flesh, I felt it coursing through my veins, burning, rapid, alert, rhythmical, and alluring as a song; the vast song, brutish and gay, of life in movement under the sun. I was happy, I was strong, I quickened my pace, climbed the rocks, ran, jumped, and discovered every minute a larger view, a more gigantic network

of desert valleys, from whence not one single chimney sent up a wreath of smoke.

Then I reached the top, dominated by other heights, and after making a circuit, I perceived on the slope of the mountain before me a bleak ruin, a heap of dark stones, and of ancient buildings supported by lofty arcades. To reach it, it was necessary to go round a large ravine and to cross a chestnut grove. The trees, old as the abbey itself, enormous, mutilated, and dying, had survived the building. Some had fallen, no longer able to sustain the weight of years; others, beheaded, had now only a hollow trunk in which ten men could conceal themselves. And they looked like a formidable army of giants, who in spite of age and thunderbolts are ready still to attempt the assault of the skies. In this fantastic wood one feels the moldy touch of centuries, the old, old life of the rotting roots, amid which, at the feet of these colossal stumps, nothing can grow. For among the gray trunks the ground is of hard stones and a blade of grass is rare.

Here are two fenced springs, or fountains, kept as drinking places for the cows.

I approach the abbey, and find myself face to face with the old buildings, the most ancient of which date back to the twelfth century, while the more recent are inhabited by a family of shepherds.

In the first court, one sees by the traces of animals that a remnant of life still haunts the spot; then after traversing crumbling and tumbling halls, like those of all ruins, one reaches the cloister, a long and low walk still under cover, surrounding a tangled square of brambles and tall grasses. In no spot in

the world have I felt such a weight of melancholy press upon my heart as in this ancient and sinister cloister, true pacing-court of monks. Certainly, the form of the arcades and the proportions of the place contribute to my emotion, to my heartache, and sadden my soul by their action on my eyes, exactly as the happy curve of some cheering bit of architecture would rejoice them. The man who built this retreat must have been possessed of a despairing heart, to have an inspiration so desolate and dreary. One would fain weep and groan within these walls, one longs to suffer, to reopen all the wounds of one's heart, to enlarge and make the very utmost of all the sorrows compressed within it.

I climbed upon a breach in the wall to see the view outside, and I understood my emotion. Nothing living around, nothing anywhere but death. Behind the abbey a mountain ascending up to the sky, around the ruins the chestnut grove, in front a valley, and beyond that more valleys,—pines, pines, an ocean of pines, and on the far horizon, pines still on the mountain tops.

And I left the place.

I crossed next a wood of cork-trees, where, a year ago, I had experienced a shock of strong and moving surprise.

It was on a gray day of October, at the time when they strip the bark of these trees to make corks of it. They strip them thus from the foot to the first branches, and the denuded trunk becomes red, a blood red as of a flayed limb. They have grotesque and twisted shapes, the look of maimed creatures writhing in epileptic fits, and I suddenly fancied

myself transported into a forest of tormented beings, a bleeding and Dantesque forest of hell, where men had roots, where bodies deformed by torture resembled trees, where life ebbed incessantly, in never-ending torment by these bleeding wounds, which produced upon me the tension of the nerves and faintness that sensitive people feel at the sudden sight of blood, or the unexpected shock of a man crushed, or fallen from a roof. And this emotion was so keen, this sensation so vivid, that I imagined I heard distracting cries and plaints, distant and innumerable; I touched one of these trees to reassure my fainting spirit, and I fancied that my hand, as I drew it back, was covered with blood.

To-day they are cured till the next barking.

At length the road appears, passing near the farm which has sheltered the long happiness of the non-commissioned officer of hussars and the colonel's daughter.

From afar I recognize the old man walking among the vines. So much the better; the wife will be alone in the house.

The servant was washing in front of the door.

"Your mistress is here," I said.

She replied, with a singular look, in the accent of the south:

"No, sir; six months ago she died."

"She is dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"And of what?"

The woman hesitated, then muttered:

"She is dead—dead, I tell you."

"But of what?"

"Of a fall, then!"

"A fall! where from?"

"From the window."

I gave her a few pence.

"Tell me about it," I said.

No doubt she strongly wished to talk of it, no doubt, too, she had often repeated this history for the last six months, for she retailed it at great length, as a story well-known by heart and invariable in its repetition.

Then I learned that for thirty years the old deaf man had had a mistress in the neighboring village, and that his wife, having learned this by chance from a passing carter, who spoke of it without knowing who she was, rushed panting and bewildered to the attic, and there hurled herself from the window, not perhaps with deliberate purpose, but impelled by the torture of the horrible agony caused by her discovery, which goaded her forward in an irresistible gust of passion, like a whip lashing and cutting. She had flown up the staircase, burst open the door, and without knowing, without being able to stop her headlong speed, had continued to run straight ahead and had leaped into empty space.

He had known nothing of it; he did not know even now; he would never know, because he was deaf. His wife was dead, that was all. All the world must die some time or other!

I could see him at a distance giving orders by signs to his laborers.

Then I caught sight of the carriage which was waiting for me in the shade of a tree, and I returned to Saint-Tropez.

VII.

Monte Carlo

I was going to bed yesterday evening, although it was only nine o'clock, when a telegram was handed to me. A friend, one of my dearest, sent me this message:

"I am at Monte Carlo for four days, and have been telegraphing to you at every port on the coast. Come to me at once."

And behold, the wish to see him, the longing to talk, to laugh, to gossip about society, about things, about people; the longing to slander, to criticise, to blame, to judge, to chatter, was alight within me in a moment, like a conflagration. On that morning, even, I should have been furious at this recall, yet in the evening I was enchanted at it; I wished myself already there, with the great dining-room of the restaurant full of people before my eyes, and in my ears that murmur of voices in which the numbers of the roulette table dominate all other phrases, like the *Dominus vobiscum* of the church services.

I called Bernard.

"We shall start at about four o'clock in the morning for Monaco," I said to him.

He replied philosophically:

"If it is fine, sir."

"It *will* be fine."

"The barometer is going down, though."

"Pooh! it will go up again."

The mariner smiled an incredulous smile. I went to bed and to sleep. It was I who woke the men. It was dark, and a few clouds hid the sky. The barometer had gone down still more. The two men shook their heads with a distrustful air.

I repeated: "Pooh! it will be fine. Come, let us be off!"

Bernard said:

"When I can see the open, I know what I am about; but here, in this harbor, at the end of this gulf, one knows nothing, sir, one can see nothing; there might be a fearful sea on, without our knowing anything about it."

I replied:

"The barometer has gone down, therefore we shall not have an east wind. Now, if we have a west wind, we can put into Agay, which is only six or seven miles off." The men did not seem much reassured; however, they got ready to start.

"Shall we take the dingy on deck?" asked Bernard.

"No, you will see it will be quite fine. Let it tow astern as usual."

A quarter of an hour later, we had quitted the harbor and were running through the entrance of the gulf, to a light and intermittent breeze.

I laughed.

"Well you see, the weather is good enough."

Soon we had passed the black and white tower built upon the Rabiou shoal, and although sheltered by Cape Camarat, which runs far out into the open sea, and of which the flashing light appeared from minute to minute, the "Bel-Ami" was already lifted forward by long, powerful, slow waves; those hills of water which move on, one behind the other, without noise, without shock, without foam, menacing without fury, alarming in their very tranquillity.

One saw nothing, one only felt the ascent and descent of the yacht over the dark and silently moving waters.

Bernard said:

"There has been a gale out at sea to-night, sir; we shall be lucky if we get in without accident."

The day broke brightly over the wild crowding waves, and we all three looked anxiously seaward to see if the squall were returning.

All this time the boat was running a great pace before the wind and with the tide. Already Agay appeared on our beam, and we held counsel whether we should make for Cannes, to escape the rough weather, or for Nice, running to seaward of the isles.

Bernard would have preferred Cannes, but as the breeze did not freshen, I decided in favor of Nice.

For three hours all went well, though the poor little yacht rolled like a cork in the awful swell.

No one who is unacquainted with the open sea, that sea of mountains, moving with weighty and rapid strides, separated by valleys which change place from second to second, filled up, and formed again

incessantly, can guess, can imagine the mysterious, redoubtable, terrifying, and superb force of the waves.

Our little dingy followed far behind us, at the extremity of forty yards of hawser, through this liquid and dancing chaos. We lost sight of it every moment, then suddenly it would reappear perched on the summit of a wave, floating along like a great white bird.

We saw Cannes in the depth of its bay, Saint-Honorat with its tower standing up among the waves, and before us the Cape d'Antibes.

The breeze freshened little by little, and the crests of the waves became flocks of sheep, those snowy sheep which move so fast, and which in countless troops career along without dog or shepherd under the endless sky.

Bernard said to me:

"It will be all we shall do to make Antibes."

And indeed seas began to break over us, with inexpressible and violent noise. The sharp squalls shook us, throwing us into yawning gulfs, whence as we emerged, we righted ourselves with terrible shocks.

The gaff was lowered, but at every oscillation of the yacht, the boom touched the waves and seemed ready to tear away the mast, which if it should fly away with the sail, would leave us to float alone and lost upon the wild waves.

Bernard cried out:

"The dingy, sir."

I turned to look. A huge wave filled it, rolled it over, enveloped it in foam as if it would devour it, and, breaking the hawser by which it was made fast

to us, took possession of it, half sinking, drowned; a conquered prey which it will presently throw upon the rocks down there, below the headland.

The minutes seem hours. Nothing can be done, we must go on, round the point in front of us, and when we have done that, we shall be sheltered, and in safety.

At last we reach it! The sea is now calm and smooth, protected as it is by the long tongue of rocks and earth which forms the Cape of Antibes.

There is the harbor from which we started only a few days ago, although it seems to me we have been voyaging for months, and we enter just as noon is striking.

The men are radiant on finding themselves back again, though Bernard repeats at every other moment:

"Ah, sir! our poor little boat; it went to my heart to see it go down like that!"

As for me, I took the four o'clock train to go and dine with my friend in the principality of Monaco.

I wish I had time to write at length about this surprising State; smaller than many a village in France, but wherein one may find an absolute sovereign, bishops, an army of Jesuits and seminarists more numerous than that of the ruler; an artillery, the guns of which are nearly all rifled, an etiquette more ceremonious than that of his lamented Majesty Louis XIV., principles of authority more despotic than those of William of Prussia, joined to a magnificent toleration for the vices of humanity, on which indeed, live the sovereign, bishops, Jesuits, seminarists, ministers, army, magistrates, everyone in short.

Hail to this great pacific monarch, who without fear of invasion or revolution, reigns peacefully over his happy little flock of subjects, in the midst of court ceremonies which preserve intact the traditions of the four reverences, the twenty-six handkissings, and all the forms used once upon a time around Great Rulers.

This monarch, moreover, is neither sanguinary nor vindictive, and when he banishes, for he does banish sometimes, the measure is put in force with the utmost delicacy.

Is a proof needful?

An obstinate player, on a day of ill luck, insulted the sovereign. A decree was issued for his expulsion.

During a whole month he prowled around the forbidden Paradise, fearing the sword blade of the archangel, in the guise of the saber of the policeman. One day, however, he hardened his heart, crossed the frontier, reached the very center of the kingdom in thirty seconds, and penetrated into the precincts of the Casino. But suddenly an official stopped him:

"Are you not banished, sir?"

"Yes, sir, but I leave by the next train."

"Oh! in that case it is all right. You can go in."

And every week he came back: and each time the same functionary asked him the same question, to which he invariably gave the same answer.

Could justice be more gentle?

Within the last few years, however, a very serious and novel case occurred within the kingdom.

This was an assassination.

A man, a native of Monaco,—not one of the wandering strangers of whom one meets legions on these

shores,—a husband, in a moment of anger, killed his wife; killed her without rhyme or reason, without any excuse that could be accepted.

Indignation was unanimous throughout the principality.

The Supreme Court met to judge this exceptional case (a murder had never taken place before), and the wretch was with one voice condemned to death.

The indignant sovereign ratified the sentence.

There only remained to execute the criminal. Then arose a difficulty. The country possessed neither guillotine nor executioner.

What was to be done? By the advice of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prince opened negotiations with France to obtain the loan of a headsman and his apparatus.

Long deliberations took place in the ministry at Paris. At last they replied by sending an estimate of the cost of moving the woodwork and the practitioner. The whole amounted to sixteen thousand francs (six hundred and forty pounds).

The monarch of Monaco reflected that the operation would cost him dear; the assassin was certainly not worth that price. Sixteen thousand francs for the head of a wretch like that! Never!

The same request was addressed to the Italian government. A King and a brother would no doubt show himself less exacting than a Republic.

The Italian government sent in a bill which amounted to twelve thousand francs (four hundred and eighty pounds).

Twelve thousand francs! It would be necessary to impose a new tax, a tax of two francs

(twenty pence) a head! This would be enough to cause serious, and hitherto unknown trouble in the State.

Then they bethought them of having the villain beheaded by a simple soldier. But the general, on being consulted, replied hesitatingly, that perhaps his men had scarcely sufficient practice to acquit themselves satisfactorily of a task, which undoubtedly demanded great experience in the handling of the sword.

Then the Prince again assembled the Supreme Court, and submitted to it this embarrassing case.

They deliberated long, without finding any practical way out of the difficulty. At last the first president proposed to commute the sentence of death to that of life-long imprisonment, and the measure was adopted.

But they did not possess a prison. It was necessary to fit one up, and a jailer was appointed who took charge of the prisoner.

For six months all went well. The captive slept all day on a straw mattress in the nook arranged for him, and his guardian lazily reclined upon a chair before the door, while he watched the passers-by.

The Prince, however, is economical — extravagance is not his greatest fault — and he has accurate accounts laid before him of the smallest expenses of his State (the list of them is not a long one). They handed him, therefore, the bill of the expenses incurred in the creation of this new function, the cost of the prison, the prisoner, and the watchman. The salary of this last was a heavy burden on the budget of the sovereign.

At first he merely made a wry face over it; but when he reflected that this might go on forever (the prisoner was young), he requested his Minister of Justice to take measures to suppress the expense.

The minister consulted the President of the Tribunal, and the two agreed to suppress the expense of a jailer. The prisoner, thus invited to guard himself, could not fail to escape, which would solve the question to the satisfaction of all parties.

The jailer was therefore restored to his family, and it became the duty of a scullion from the palace kitchen to carry to the prisoner his morning and evening meals. But the captive made no attempt to recover his liberty.

Finally, one day, as they had neglected to furnish him with food, they beheld him tranquilly appear at the palace to claim it; and from that day forward, it became his habit to come at meal-times to the palace to eat with the servants, whose friend he became, and thus save the cook the trouble of the walk to and fro.

After breakfast he would take a turn as far as Monte Carlo. He sometimes went into the Casino, to venture a five-franc piece on the green cloth. When he had won, he gave himself a good dinner at one of the most fashionable hotels; then he returned to his prison, carefully locking his door on the inside.

He never slept away a single night.

The situation became a little puzzling, not for the convict, but for the judges.

The court assembled afresh, and it was decided that they should invite the criminal to leave the State of Monaco.

FROM AN ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH.

In the Grand Roulette Room, Monte Carlo.

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When this decision was announced to him, he simply replied:

"You are pleased to be facetious. Well, and what would become of me in that case? I have no longer any means of subsistence. I have no longer a family. What would you have me do? I was condemned to death. You did not choose to execute me. I made no complaint. I was afterwards condemned to imprisonment for life, and placed in the hands of a jailer. You took away my guardian. Again I made no complaint.

"Now, to-day, you want to turn me out of the country. Not if I know it. I am a prisoner, your prisoner, judged and condemned by you. I am faithfully fulfilling my sentence. I remain here."

The Supreme Court was floored. The Prince was in a terrible rage, and ordered fresh measures to be taken.

Deliberations were resumed.

Then, at last, they decided to offer to the culprit a pension of six hundred francs (twenty-four pounds), if he would leave the State and live elsewhere.

He accepted.

He has rented a little plot five minutes' walk from the kingdom of his former sovereign, and lives happily upon his property, cultivating a few vegetables, and despising all potentates.

However, the court of Monaco has profited, though a little late, by this experience, and has made a treaty with the French government, by which they send their convicts over to France, who keeps them out of sight, in consideration of a modest compensation.

In the judicial archives of the principality, one is

shown the decree which settles the pension, by which the rascal was induced to leave the State of Monaco.

Opposite to the palace, rises the rival establishment, the Roulette. There is, however, no hatred no hostility between them; for the one supports the other, which in return protects the first. Admirable example! Unique instance of two neighboring and powerful families living in peace in one tiny state: an example well calculated to efface the remembrance of the Capulets and the Montagues. Here, the house of the sovereign; there, the house of play; the old and the new society fraternizing to the sound of gold.

The saloons of the Casino are as readily opened to strangers as those of the Prince are difficult of access.

I turn to the first.

A noise of money, continuous as that of the waves, a noise at once deep, light, and terrible, fills the ears from the moment one enters, then fills the soul, stirs the heart, troubles the mind, and bewilders thought. Everywhere this sound, this singing, crying, calling, tempting, rending sound.

Around the tables, a motley crowd of players, the scum of every continent and of every society; mixed with princes, or future kings, women of fashion, *bourgeois,* money lenders, disreputable women; a mixture unique in the world, of men of all races, of all castes, of all kinds, of every origin; a perfect museum of adventurers from Russia, Brazil, Chili, Italy, Spain, Germany; of old women with reticules, of disreputable young ones carrying little bags containing keys, a handkerchief, and the last three five-franc pieces

which are kept for the green cloth, when the vein of luck shall chance to return.

I approached the first table, and saw a pale face, with lined forehead and hard-set lip; features convulsed, with an expression of evil—the young woman of Agay Bay, the beautiful sweetheart of the sunny wood, and the moonlit bay. He, too, is there, seated before her, his hand resting on a few napoleons.

"Play on the first square," said she.

He inquired anxiously:

"All?"

"Yes, all."

He placed the coins in a little heap.

The croupier turned the wheel. The ball ran, danced, and stopped.

"Rien ne va plus"—"Nothing further counts," jerks forth the voice, which resumes after a moment:

"Twenty-eight."

The young woman started, and in a hard, sharp tone said:

"Come away."

He rose, and without looking at her, followed her; and one felt that some dreadful thing had sprung up between them.

Some one remarked:

"Good-bye to love. They don't look as if they were of one mind to-day."

A hand taps me on the shoulder. I turn round. It is my friend.

* * * * * * *

I have only now to ask pardon for having thus trespassed on my reader by talking so much of myself. I had written this journal of day-dreams entirely

for myself, or rather, I had taken advantage of my floating solitude to capture the wandering ideas which are wont to traverse our minds, like birds on the wing.

But I am asked to publish these few pages, which, unconnected, deficient in composition and in art, follow one after the other without a reason, and abruptly conclude without a motive; simply because a squall of wind put an end to my voyage.

I have yielded to this request. Perhaps I am wrong.

DES VERS

OR

ROMANCES IN RHYME

BY

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

VOL. XIII

ST. DUNSTAN SOCIETY
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DEDICATION

TO

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT,

TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS AND PATERNAL FRIEND, WHOM I LOVE
WITH ALL MY HEART: TO THE PRE-EMINENT
MASTER, WHOM I ADMIRE ABOVE
ALL OTHERS.

FLAUBERT'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT

CROISSET, Feb. 19, 1880.

MY DEAR FELLOW:

Can it be true? I thought first of all that it was a joke. But now I acquiesce in the decree of fate.

Well, well, those are droll folks you have at Etampes! Are we to be subject to the whim of every court in French territory, including the colonies? And how is it that a piece of poetry inserted long ago in a Parisian journal, since extinct, becomes at once an illegal utterance, so soon as it is copied in a provincial paper? To whom are we responsible, pray? How ought we to write? In what Bœotia are we living?

"Arrested for an outrage on manners and on public morality," two synonymous expressions, making up two counts of indictment. When I was in your position, there was a third count in my indictment, a third outrage was mentioned, namely, "an outrage against religion." I allude to my appearance before the court with regard to my Madame Bovary, in a suit which was a tremendous advertisement for me, and to which I attribute two thirds of my success. To tell you plainly I am perfectly puzzled about this matter. Are you the victim and object of some secret vengeance? There is something crooked under all this. Do they wish to make a laughing stock of the Republic? Perhaps they do.

I can understand why a man should be prosecuted for writing a political article; although I defy all the courts to show what good such a prosecution has ever done. But to prosecute a man for a piece of literature, for a poem—seems to me absurd.

They will tell you in reply, that your poetry has certain "tendencies" and that these are licentious. The theory of "tendencies" is capable of a wide application, and in this connection must be considered the problem, "the place of morality in art." Now, in my opinion, whatever is beautiful is moral. Poetry is like the sun and irradiates even the dunghill with its gold. They only are unfortunate to whom the gold is invisible.

Your handling of a familiar theme was perfect; for this, so far from meriting blame or imprisonment, you deserve the eulogy of mankind. "The talent of an author," says La Bruyère, "consists in possessing distinction and verisimilitude." You have exhibited both of these qualities. What more do they want?

But the "subject," some Prudhomme will object, the "subject," my dear fellow,—two lovers,—a pretty girl,—the water side. You ought to treat such a subject more delicately, with greater reserve, to point the moral with an elegant aphorism; and bring in at the end a venerable ecclesiastic, or a learned theologian to talk upon the dangers of love. In a word, your narrative hints at the union of the sexes.

In the first place, it does no such thing; and even if this should be the case, what crime is there in preaching the worship of woman? But I preach nothing; my poor lovers do not even commit an act

of adultery. They are free, bound by no tie to anyone. Ah! you will find much trouble in making your defense, for the "respectables" are never at a loss for an argument. Resign yourself, therefore.

Utter, then, to your accuser your denunciations against all the Greek and Roman classics, so that he may be persuaded to suppress these also, from Aristophanes to gentle Horace and tender Virgil; those also of foreign lands, Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron, Cervantes; and in our own country, Rabelais, the fount of French literature. You may add Chateaubriand, the action of whose masterpiece turns on incest, and Molière, against whom you will remember Bossuet raged, and the great Corneille, whose "Theodore" has prostitution for its motif; and Father La Fontaine and Voltaire and Rousseau. Add to these, the fairy tales of Perrault. What is the theme of "Peau-d'Ane"? In what place is the fourth act of "Roi s'amuse" carried on? To judge from these we must also suppress those books of history which soil the imagination.

I am disgusted with their absurdities and our excellent "Voltaire" (not the great man, but the newspaper of that name) which the other day joked me upon my belief that literature was the object of hatred, is very much deceived, and I am more than ever confirmed in my opinion that pure style is the butt of reckless execration. A good writer immediately confronts two enemies: first the public, because his style compels thought and demands exertion on the part of the reader; and secondly the government, which detects in you good writers a certain influence, and power hates to see the rise of another power.

A change of government amounts to nothing; Monarchy, Empire, Republic, all are alike. Official æsthetics never change. By virtue of their position, administrators and magistrates are the only men of taste; take, for example, the arguments that led to my acquittal. They know how a man ought to write, their rhetoric is infallible, and they possess the means of proving it to you.

A man mounts toward the height of Olympus, his face is lit with a celestial ray, his heart is full of hope, of aspiration toward the beautiful, the divine; he is already half transported to the sky; but a wretched jailer's hand drags him back into the gutter. If you hold converse with the muse, they take you for a debaucher of girls. If you bathe in the fragrant waves of the Permessus, they confound you with the ill-savored gentry who haunt the sewers.

And they will make you stand, my friend, at the bar with thieves; and you will hear a fellow read your verses, stumbling over the feet, and re-read them, laying stress on some words to which he will give a double meaning; and some of them he will repeat over several times, like citizen Pinard with his "Note his mention of her ankle. Gentlemen, think of it, her ankle!"

And while your lawyer signs to you to keep quiet and maddens you all the more, you will have a vague feeling that following in pursuit of you are the police, the army, the whole force of public opinion, and that you are crushed and outnumbered. Then, perhaps, your heart will feel rising within it a hatred, the existence of which you had never suspected, coupled with plans of vengeance, which are immediately

checked by a feeling of pride. But let me repeat, all this is impossible. You will not be prosecuted; you will not be condemned. There has been some blunder, some misunderstanding. The Chancellor will interfere. The glorious days of the Restoration have not yet returned.

Yet who knows? Earth has its boundaries, but human stupidity is limitless.

With sincere regards, I am

Your old friend,

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT.

THE WALL

WIDE were the sashes thrown, the lighted room
Poured forth its gleams of splendor on the gloom;
Bright flashes played upon the grassy ground;
The park below seemed answering to the sound
Of pipe and viol, with a glad rebound.
Charged with the scent of leaves and garnered croft,
The tepid air of night, like breathing soft,
Lingered around the shoulders of the fair,
And blent the woodland and the desert air
With beauty's magic fragrance; and the gleam
Of tapers quivered in the scented stream.
The breath of flowers from dappled meadows came
Of flowers that decked the hair of many a dame.
A chill gust murmured from the spangled sky,
As if an odor of the stars came by.

The ladies marked, seated on cushions soft,
Silent and still, with liquid eye, how oft

The curtain swelled, as loosened sails unfold,
And dreamed of voyage on that sky of gold,
There the great starry ocean lay unrolled!
And wistful longings o'er their spirits move
Bidding them bow beneath the spell of love;
Bidding them tell, with voices sweet and low,
The secret that their hearts alone can know.
On rolled the music, like a perfume rare;
In rhythmic waves flowed midnight's scented air.
As came the call of stags upon the blast
A shudder through the white robed circle passed.
Each left her seat, the music's strain was still;
For o'er the summit of the crested hill,
Appeared, as fire 'mid withered branches shines,
The huge red moon, behind a copse of pines.
Then fairly risen, her full round orb displaying,
Up to the distant heaven she soared apace,
Like some pale human form, forever straying
Around the world, to find its resting place.

Then each her pathway through the shadows took;
Where, like the sleeping waters of a brook
The pale sand glistened, in a silvery day,
Beneath the placid moon's delicious ray.
On the soft night woke love in every heart,
Till from each eye, the flames of passion start.
Demure the ladies went, as pondering
To find soft moonlight in their bosom spring;
And every breeze brought languor on its wing.

And I went wandering, too, amid them all.
I know not why, yet well do I recall
My heart was light as at a festival.

A rippling peal of laughter, low and sweet,
Smote on my ear and stayed my hurrying feet.
I turned my head, and, suddenly, in sight
Appeared the lady of my heart's delight.
Alas! she had been coy, nor e'er would bow
Her rebel spirit to my whispered vow.
"Lend me your arm," she cried, "the path is dark,
And we will skirt the boscage of the park."
Her speech in merry mood of mockery ran.
"The moon," she cried, "is like a widow wan;
Too long for us, to-night, the way we wend;
'Tis quite impossible we reach the end.
Too new and delicate this robe of mine,
And all unfit for roads these slippers fine.
Let us retrace our steps," at last she said.
But still, still onward, I my lady led.
Then forward sprang she, like a wandering sprite,
A creature only seen in fancy's light.
Her robe, as on she moved, at random flew,
And fanned the air, till gentle breezes blew
And stirred the slumbering woodland with the small,
Faint whisper that foretells the coming squall.
Then, breathless, suddenly her step she stayed,
And softly, without sound, our way we made
Along the pathway of a green arcade.
Upon our ears a sound of voices stole—
Low, tender accents from the inmost soul,
And all the shadows round with passion thrilled.
Amid the noises that the woodland filled
Sometimes we could discern that sound of bliss,
When two fond hearts are wedded in a kiss.
Ah! it was then, at that soft sound of love,
Her peal of laughter echoed through the grove.

Then suddenly to silence sank again;
And rapid steps were heard across the plain.
And in confusion, each deserted swain
Cursed the fond fool who made their hiding known.
A nightingale beside us made his moan,
Warbling upon a tree his melody,
A quail from distant marshlands made reply.

But lo! we came, before we were aware,
On a blank wall, whose blank and brutal glare,
Rising before us, took us by surprise,
And almost robbed of sense our dazzled eyes.
Right in our path the tall, white barrier flamed
Like to the palace all of metal framed,
The magic house in fairy legend famed.
We saw it from afar, upon our way,
As if in ambush for our steps it lay.
"The moonlight on that whitened area spread
Favors our good behavior," she said;
"When falls the night, the groves in darkness cower
And are no place for us, at such an hour.
Here let us sit," she said, "before the wall
Whose bright reflections on our faces fall."
Then down she sat, and smiled, as if she guessed,
The storm of rage that rose within my breast.
High in the heavens, the moon had risen in view,
And then I thought that it was smiling too.
And both together, yet I know not why,
The lady by my side, the moon on high,
Seemed to conspire and treat me mockingly.
Thus on the grassy turf we took our seat,
While the great wall rose pallid at our feet.

And I was silent, for I dared not say
"I love you," 'neath that penetrating ray.
But, as my speechless tongue was turned to stone,
I seized her hands and held them in my own;
And as I held them fast, and hardly breathed,
Her lips with a coquettish smile were wreathed.
She waited, as the hunter for his game,
As near and nearer to her arms I came.
Where o'er the path the shadows thickest grow,
Kindling the forest gloom with feeble glow,
Soft trailing figures glided to and fro.

The pallid moonlight over us was spread;
And, in its milk-white radiance, it shed
A spell that made our hearts, as if they felt
Its witchery, in tender anguish melt.
At her full height she glided on apace,
There was a placid splendor in her face,
A majesty in her unfettered pace,
That pierced our flesh as with a burnished blade,
And on our hearts a feverish languor laid.

I looked on my companion; through my heart,
Senses, and quivering spirit, I felt dart
Those strange and poignant pangs, which rage as fire
Whene'er the charms of womankind inspire
The overwhelming fever of desire.
Whene'er, as, on our couch of rest we lie,
Many a troubled dream goes sweeping by,—
The kiss, in token of surrender meant,
And the closed lid, that silent gives consent!

Yet never lady fair has yielded more,
To him who waits and worships at her door,
Than the fond hope that, in some weaker hour,
Her soul may yield itself to passion's power.

My throat was parched, and with a sudden flame
Flushes of fever wrung my shuddering frame.
A slave's wild fancy swept across my brain;
I was a slave and I had broke my chain.
I felt the joy, because I had the strength
To seize my prey and capture it at length.
My prey, this proud, calm woman, who in vain
Should mourn at last her insolent disdain.

And she was smiling, and her mocking air
And fearless bearing made her seem more fair.
Her breathing was a vapor fine and rare
For which I thirsted. O'er my bounding heart
I felt a wave of sudden madness start;
I seized her in my arms and closely pressed
The fearful, trembling creature to my breast.
Then from her grassy seat she rose in haste,
And I with sudden anger clasped her waist.
I kissed her, bending like a sudden storm
The long, lithe contours of her supple form
And dominating eye, and forehead fair,
And dewy mouth and long disheveled hair.
The moon triumphant rode the heavens serene,
And with unclouded gladness lit the scene.
And while I now held fast upon my prey,
And strength and fury seemed to have their way,
One last, one crowning effort she essayed
And flung me backward humbled and dismayed.

Then once again we wrestled as before,
Close to the wail, that in its surface bore
The semblance of a canvas, white as snow.
On which, as we went struggling to and fro,
Appeared a startling, laughter-moving show.
There dancing in the moonlight's silvery sheen,
Our wild disordered shapes were clearly seen,
In shadowed imitation on the wall;
Now drawing closer do those shadows fall,
Now disentangled from the tight embrace,
Now closing breast to breast, and face to face.
Like two buffoons their shadows seemed, forsooth,
Gesticulating in a rustic booth;
Or, like the senseless puppets of the stage,
Twisting and turning in their mimic rage,
And representing, as an idle jest,
Love's sudden onset in a human breast.
The writhing shadows now grotesque appear:
Now each contorted image shakes with fear;
Now, like two rams upon the valley's side,
The shadowy heads upon the wall collide.
Then each thin lengthened image on the wall,
Stands fixed and rigid as some column tall.
Sometimes, four arms gigantic stretch amain,
And their black lengths the snowy surface stain,
Then in grotesque endearments they unite,
And seemed to swoon in kisses in delight.

So laughable those figures in the light;
So unexpected was the curious sight;
She laughed. But how can woman shun defeat
And how forbid a lover's lips to meet

With hers, if once her laughter yields the day?
When once her serious rage has passed away,
A greater victory can the lover claim,
Than if her heart were filled with passion's flame.

The nightingale was singing in his tree;
In vain the moon looked down from heaven to see
Those double shadows 'neath her radiance fall;
She saw one shadow, merely, on the wall.

A SUNSTROKE

It was the month of June, a glorious day,
When all the world was festal in array;
The noisy crowd flowed onward carelessly;
And I myself was gay, I know not why;
Their murmur roused me like the wine-cup's power,
And my brain reeled, in that meridian hour.
The sun was beating down like tongues of flame,
And stirred the potent juices of my frame.
Into the inmost chambers of my breast
With all his force and majesty he pressed.
And I felt, burning, run through every vein
The transport and the rapture and the pain,
Which Adam our primeval father knew,
When the first sunrise woke upon his view.
'Twas then a woman passed along the street,
And turned her eyes on me, my glance to meet.
I know not what the fire, nor what the dart
That eye of hers had shot into my heart.

Alas! I do not know, I cannot tell,
What wildering madness on my spirit fell;
But instantly, I bent to the control,
Of the wild impulse that had seized my soul.
To fall upon that woman's form divine:
A furious passion bade me closely twine
My arms about her, lay her lips to mine.
A cloud of blood hung o'er me, dark and red,
And on mine eyes, a sudden blindness shed;
I seized and held her fast against my breast,
And savage kisses on her mouth I pressed.
And as she lay, locked in my close embrace,
I laid her swaying figure down to rest;
Then with a sudden effort, into space
I mounted, spurning this domain of dust,
And soaring from the planet's crumbling crust,
And she lay on my bosom, as I sailed
Into the realms where sunlight never failed;
She, breast to breast with me, and eye to eye,
Passed toward the empyrean canopy;
Onward and onward, journeying afar,
I mounted nearer to that fiery star,
Nor guessed, while on that face my vision fed,
That my convulsive arms embraced the dead.

HORROR

THAT evening, in my study, I had read
The writings of an author long since dead.
'Twas midnight, when my soul was seized with fear—
A fear of what? I know not; none was near,
Friend to console, or foe to do me harm;
And yet I shuddered, breathless with alarm,
As if a portent bade me understand
Some nameless act of horror was at hand.
I thought that some one stood behind my chair,
Smiling a cruel smile, a grisly leer,
Whose moveless lines would never disappear;
Yet not an uttered accent moved the air.
I was in torture lest he touch my hair,
And, bending over me, that cursed face,
A long lean hand upon my shoulder place;
For were that hand to stroke me I should die.
Ah, he was drawing nearer to my seat,
Closer and closer on those soundless feet;
And were it for my soul's salvation, I

Would not have ventured in that moment dread
To make one movement, or to turn my head.
And just as birds, when furious tempests blow,
Are buffeted and beaten to and fro,
Hither and thither turned my startled thought,
As if some refuge from despair I sought.
Sweat drenched my members, as if death were near,
Yet all was silence in that chamber drear,
Save my own chattering teeth that shook for fear.

But suddenly, I heard a creaking sound,
As if some viewless forms went hurrying by;
With terror dazed, I uttered a wild cry.
Ah, never yet had such a fearful note
Found utterance in any human throat;
Then fell I stiff and senseless to the ground.

A CONQUEST

ALONG the boulevard a young man passed,
Swiftly he hurried on with listless eye,
Nor on the girls a single look he cast,
The girls, whose smile allures the passer-by.

But now so sweet a perfume swept the air,
That looking up, he saw a dame divine,
Or rather of a neck he was aware,
Rounded, yet supple, upon shoulders fine.

He followed her—and why? for, nothing, save,
That the arched foot, that ambles in and out
Beneath a snowy garment's passing wave
With love's soft instinct leads all men about.

He saw that luxury her limbs enlaced,
And longed to know if the decree of fate
Had, by chill poverty, her life disgraced,
Or given her goodness joined to high estate.

And as she heard the echoing step behind,
She turned her head, and, marvelous to declare,
With that one glance she seemed his soul to bind,
And he grew eager to address the fair.

He knew the soul's true entrance is the ear;
The subtle power of eloquence he knew;
But as the corner of the street was near,
Amid a crowd, she vanished from his view.

He cursed the idle loiterers of the street,
Whose hustling shoulders forced him to delay,
And sought in vain that peerless form to meet
Until the darkness closed upon the day.

At first he felt a bitter pang of grief,
And walked along, like a lost soul astray;
Then in a cooling draught he sought relief,
And early slept to dream his pain away.

You'll say the youth was of a simple mind;
But without dreams how few the joys we own?
How sweet, while in the chimney roars the wind,
In dreams to linger with some fair unknown.

On that brief vision for eight days he fed;
And, 'mid the dazzling crowd of night dreams, sought
By his own amorous inspiration led,
The sweetest, most delusive realms of thought.

Foolish are dreams like those, in waking hours!
What castles of adventure did he build;
For when the young soul feels its opening powers,
Our budding hopes the vainest prospect gild.

In dreams he followed her to foreign lands;
Together trod the classic plains of Greece;
Now like some ballad knight in arms he stands,
Before the castle seeking her release.

And now they wander on the mountain slope;
And now above the precipices they stray,
Talking of love's large avenue of hope,
Planning the advent of a happier day.

And sometimes, when propitious is the hour,
And tender twilight makes the young heart bold,
He plants a kiss upon that rosy flower,
Her mouth, and she returns a hundredfold.

Then hand in hand, they post away from town,
The horses gallop in their mad career;
And then they dream until the night is flown,
While the moon shines reflected in the mere.

Sometimes he sees her, thoughtful chatelaine,
On the carved cusp of Gothic balcony;
Sometimes she lightly rides across the plain,
Or speeds the hawk or hound upon their prey.

He is her page, and hopes her love to gain;
Ah, yielding is the ancient baron's bride!
In the deep wood with that fair chatelaine,
Her sole companion, still he wanders wide.

Eight days his dreams were of such stuff as this;
He closed his door against each nearest friend,
None he received to mar that heaven of bliss,
Or bring that radiant reverie to an end.

And sometimes, when the evening hour was nigh,
Forth would he steal to some forsaken seat,
And with no sign of living but a sigh,
Indulge his soul in retrospection sweet.

And when he waked one morning, as of yore
Yawning, and rubbing slumber from his eyes,
A troop of friends came rushing to his door,
Spoke all at once, and laughed at his surprise.

For they had planned a country jaunt that day,—
Sailing canoes, wandering the woody plain,
Shocking the country people by their play,
Dining *al fresco*, drinking iced champagne.

And first he answered them with much disgust;
Their picnic did not suit his taste, he said;
When they drove off amid a cloud of dust,
He changed his mind, and bounded from his bed.

His second thoughts induced him to conclude,
That it was sweet to dream on flowery leas;
That running water soothes a thoughtful mood;
And then how pleasant is the shade of trees!

Sad memories are like withered boughs, that float
Carried away upon the murmuring stream,
And reverie suits the rocking of a boat,
And blooming orchards prompt a vernal dream.

There is intoxication, strong and deep,
In running swift to breathe the open air;
The gusts that from the mountain summits creep,
The scent of hay by running brooks is rare.

How charming is the murmur of the stream,
The wood-bird's song is like an anodyne;
How sweet to float upon a wandering dream,
As travelers sailing down some flood divine.

He called his groom, and dressed himself complete;
And after breakfast to the station wends,
Lights a cigar, and quickly takes his seat,
And at Marly is greeted by his friends.

The plain was moistened with the tears of night,
And a light mist in far-off fields was seen,
The birds were singing, and the sun was bright,
On the fresh pool his radiance shone serene.

When rising sap with verdure tints the grove,
And life in nature bursts again to sight,
And dawn is ushered in with songs of love,
Man's soul and body swell with deep delight.

'Tis very true his luncheon had been good,
That fumes of wine had mounted to his head,
That, finally, the air of field and flood
With a new festal joy his spirit fed.

Then he embarked upon the light canoe;
In a faint wind the reeds were whispering round,
The rushes murmured sweetly, and he drew
A sense of calm contentment from the sound.

Then come the oarsmen; and their measured rhyme
Echo repeats around with softened strain;
Through foam and gathering waves the oars keep time,
To the deep-chested notes of that refrain.

In haste to capture first the inn's *cuisine,*
Other canoes before him take their start;
He hears a shrill laughter come from lips unseen,
And yet the sound strikes to his very heart.

She! in a boat? Yes, sitting in the stern,
She holds the tiller, and with songs goes by,—
And thunderstruck this wondrous fact to learn,
He sees his beauty down the river fly.

He fretted over this till dinner time;
And then he stopped before a tavern small,
Where vines about a garden trellis climb,
And shade falls from a ring of lime-trees tall.

Already others from canoes had landed,
Swearing and quarreling with dreadful din,
And spreading their own table, had demanded
The whole accommodations of the inn.

And she was with them, drinking an absinthe,
At his blank face she smiled in merry mood,
But when she called, his looks replied: "I can't."
"Donkey!" she cried, "you take me for a prude!"

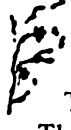
Then trembling he approached her, and they dined
Together, but he wondered, secretly,
How anyone would ever be inclined
To credit her with lofty pedigree!

A merry girl, light hearted in her talk,
Who called him her Dear Boy, her very own,
Offered her glass and fed him with her fork,
And would not let him leave the inn alone.

Ah, his poetic heart had thought to find
A flawless diamond, but 'twas paste, instead!
He took it thankfully, and bore in mind,
That "Half a loaf is better than no bread."

A SNOWY NIGHT

THERE is no motion on the voiceless plain,
That stretches white to the horizon's brim;
No peal of laughter and no cry of pain
Rises in that dead desert, cold and grim,
Save that afar, at yonder coppice gate,
Some dog, unsheltered, howls disconsolate.



There is no music in the chilling air;
No stubble spreads the pathway at our feet.
The blight of winter withers everywhere
The summer bloom of life that was so sweet.
Like skeleton or fleshless phantoms stand,
The trees along the horizon of the land.

The full moon hastes across the steely sky,
Pale is she, as if shivering in the cold
Of that vast vault, that frozen canopy,
From which she seems us mortals to behold,
Views our poor desert earth, with scornful mien,
And rushes past us to a fairer scene.

And if she showers on us her darting rays,
They are but dropping icicles of frost,
That cheat us with a semblance, as she lays
A gleam so grim and cold, in mist half lost,
Upon the wilderness of distant snow,
That with infernal light it seems to glow.

And through the forest alleys sobs the wind,—
A breath of shuddering frost with killing power.
Where shall the birds this night a shelter find?
The forest's birds in winter's direst hour
When leaves are stripped from every safe retreat,
And every perch is frozen 'neath their feet?

In the tall leafless trees the silver frost
Is hanging, like a glassy coat of mail;
There the birds crowd, and trembling, as if lost,
Forever, gaze upon the snowdrifts pale,
With restless eye, and vainly wait for night
To come and quench the chilled and cruel light.

A MESSAGE OF LOVE

In the Garden of the Tuileries

Come to me, little child, whose mother sweet
Makes my poor heart with throbs of passion beat.
Upon this bench she often loves to stay,
Watching her darling child before her play.
Pale is she, and her hair is such as gleams
Through fancy's softest, most delicious dreams.
I see it now, above her forehead lie,
Bright as the radiance of the starlight sky.
Come to me, dearest child, and let me press
Thy rosy lips with deepest tenderness.
Let me once more thy large blue eyes behold,
And plant one kiss upon thy curls of gold.
Thus, little darling, would I make thee bear
A load of kisses to her, unaware.
And thus, when thou returnest to her side,
And the soft darkness comes with eventide,

And when thy little arms at last are thrown
Around that tapering neck, I may not own,—
Upon thy rosy lip she still may find
And on those locks of gold she loves to bind,
The burning kiss, my lips have left behind.
Ah! sweet shall that be as the dawn of love.
Then shall she say, while trembling flushes move
Across the cheeks she guards from looks of mine,
And takes my kiss from those curled locks of thine,
"What is it on my daughter's brow to-night
That stirs my bosom with this strange delight?"

AT THE WATER S SIDE

I.

A SULTRY sun was shining o'er the flood
Where floating laundries on the river stood.
The drowsy ducks, above the silent mill,
At the pool's edge, were ranged in slumber still.
The air with sunny radiance was alight;
The trees seemed kindling into beacons bright;
And I was resting on the grass, reclined
Near to the ancient boat, where women find
A summer laundry of a pleasant kind.
And down the current floated in a line
The soapy water. There the bubbles shine,
And burst their iridescent orbs divine.
And I was dozing, as I idly lay
Upon the grass that balmy summer's day;
Till I saw some one come along the way.
In the full radiance of the sun she trod,
With firm and rapid step, the fiery sod,
That girl, who seemed the daughter of a god!

Her rounded arms were carried high in air
Above her head, to keep in balance, there,
The load of laundry linen white and fair.
Broad-hipped and slender-waisted was the maid,
A marble Venus scantily arrayed.
Straight as a column to the stream she strode,
And balanced on her head the heavy load.
I followed her adown the pathway straight,
Until she halted at the laundry gate.

At last she chose her place, a vacant nook,
And, with a strong and supple grace, she took
And plunged her burden in the bubbling brook.
Less bare was she than those who at her side
Pursued their labors in the flowing tide.
And as she plied her task, each movement made
By tapering arms and haunches strong, displayed
Under the clinging skirt, that from her waist
Descended folding, with a sculptor's taste,
The rounded contours and the grace expressed
By tapering lines and by her swelling breast.
Hard was her toil, and, when she sought for rest,
She raised her glorious arms above her face,
And, with superb and unaffected grace,
Stretched her lithe body backward, and in haste
Bent in soft play the tendons of her waist.
The sun was powerful, and, with many a creak,
I heard the overheated timber speak.
The ancient vessel seemed to break its sheath
And open up, some cooling air to breathe.
With weary toil each panting bosom heaves,
And sweating arms relax the clinging sleeves.

New flushes now those mantling cheeks bedeck
And add a heightened tint to many a neck.
With fearless eye she looked into my face,
Then sought her swelling bodice to unlace.
And now at last her rounded breasts, I see,
Above the loosened frilling are set free.
And then she beat her linen, and each stroke
The surging contours of her bosom woke
To life, in rosy tints, that rise like flowers
Blowing in summer's parti-colored bowers.
A hot air from the laundry hits the sense,
As from some murky foundry dark and dense,
Bearing the sighs, that on the summer float
From many a rosy toiler's swelling throat;
And every stroke her supple motion deals
My heart within its deep recesses feels.
She looks at me with raillery in her eye;
And nearer still I draw, to watch her ply,
With humid bosom, fair exceedingly,
The busy toil, that makes her bosom white
The homage of a tender kiss invite.
I see compassion melting in her gaze;
For she can recognize my timid ways,
And, with a woman's wit, she deigns to ask
Some questions, and to tattle of her task.
And when, with many an effort vague, I reach,
Through incoherent sounds, the power of speech,
I do not understand one word she says
As on the beauty of her form I gaze.
The beauties that her bodice has unsealed
Tell of the charms beneath it unrevealed.
I burn with maddening ardor at the sight;
Then closing up her labors for the night

She bids me, in a whisper, stand and wait
Her coming in yon dell at evening late.

And all that filled my bosom with delight
Has vanished as she passes out of sight.
All my past years that moment disappear,
As water spilt upon some desert drear.
And yet I did rejoice; for in my heart,
I felt, that hour, the song of passion start.
Ceaseless I gazed upon the paling sky;
It seemed to me the night's obscurity
Shone luminous, as if the dawn were nigh.

II.

First at the tender trysting place was she;
I met her and I sank on bended knee—
Then raised my hands and sought, with loving haste,
To clasp the rounded beauty of her waist.
I tried in vain to draw her to my side;
I felt her quick from my embraces glide
And, like a shadow, out of sight she sped;
The moonlight bathed the grasses as she fled.
I followed, and I found the prey I sought;
For in a thorny brake her foot was caught.
I closed my arms about her as she sighed,
And bore her trembling to the forest's side,
Where at the water's edge a tree had spread
Its tangled roots that reached the river's bed.
And I, who erst had seen her, with no sign
Of modesty reveal her charms divine,

Beheld her pale and troubled, filled with fears.
Her rosy cheek was wet with gentle tears;
Her startled frailty did my senses move
With the intoxicating sting of love.

Whence comes this fever of the lover's brain?
What is it shakes our being, with such pain,
In the soft hour when love's delight we gain?

The moon had risen, and her silver ray
Filled the whole landscape with a pallid day.
Amid the reeds, the frogs were croaking loud;
A mingled din they made, that noisy crowd,
Whose haunts the sedges and the rushes shroud.
Far from the distance could I hear the hail,
In double note, of solitary quail.
The birds awoke, and, with their chansons shrill,
Began their serenades beneath the hill.
And as fresh kisses on her cheeks I press,
Down sank she, murmuring, at my soft caress
While sobs and sighs her heaving heart oppress,
Beneath those drooping lids her eyes were bright;
Our sighs and senses mingled in delight;
Then in the evening calm there seemed to creep
O'er nature's wearied heart the balm of sleep.
The cry of love alone was sounding loud;
And startled birds within the coppice crowd;
And, for one moment, ceased the murmur harsh
That rose but lately from the peopled marsh.
All voices, all terrestrial sounds were still;
The quail no longer piped upon the hill;
All sounds of living nature seemed to die,
And boundless silence filled the sky,

Saving that thrice a mournful howl was heard,
Amid the noiseless life of beast and bird,
As from some mountain hamlet, perched on high,
The house-dog breathed his challenge to the sky.
And dazzling day was breaking o'er the sea,
As on swift feet she fled away from me.
I strode at random through the fields that morn;
And every scent that on the breeze was borne
Brought me a memory of her haunting face:
Her glances kept me anchored in that place.
And like two convicts by one chain confined
There was one tie that did our spirits bind.

III.

Five months had passed away, and still I sank
Each eventide, upon that river bank,
With no abatement of my passion's power.
There fondling, in that sweet and tranquil hour,
Upon the fragrant turf, that maiden rare,
Superbly passionate as she was fair.
And every morning, thinking o'er the past
It seemed our dearest meeting was the last.
Our last night's kisses no satiety
Could bring us. From the wild bird's morning cry
Through the long day we lived disconsolate,
And thought the rest of evening came too late.
Sometimes, forgetting that the day was near,
The dawn surprised us, and the chanticleer
Woke us from bliss to thread the toiling strand
Eye fixed on melting eye, and hand in hand.

And oft I saw the thickets glow with light,
And the gray forest trunks grow crimson bright,
As if the blood of wounds was on their bark,
And yet methought the wide heaven still was dark,
For to my fancy, when the flames of morn
In dazzling splendor to my face were borne,
'Twas merely the refulgence of her gaze,
That tipped with purple dye the morning haze.
Each day she joined the toilers on the strand;
Each day I patient waited till the land
Was darkened, and the sunlight quenched its fire.
I fed my heart on passionate desire;
No greater pleasure would my spirit ask
Than watching her attentive to her task;
Patient I stood with her before my eyes;
The sole horizon that I saw arise
Was the rare outline of her heaving breast;
For by that vision did I live in thrall,
Like to a prisoner in his narrow wall—
My hopes no wider expectation taste,
Than lay within the belt that bound her waist.
Close to her side I stood a sentinel,
Lest others should approach, and feel the spell
Of her gay beauty that I loved so well.
At every sign of danger, I was near;
And she would turn her head, with glances clear,
That called me, and our lips were joined once more,
Then parted and the troublous hour was o'er.
Sometimes, she left her task; and at her sign
I followed to the shelter of the vine,
Where in a field its gadding tendrils spread.
Or to some neighboring thicket oft she fled;

And there we watched the loves of beast and bird,
Or viewed the transports of the lowing herd.
Ofttimes, we saw the woodland birds draw near
To bill and coo before us, without fear.
Through nature's realm we marked the happy pairs;
They did not dread us, for our lot was theirs.

Then, when my heart with thought of her was filled,
At that late hour, when nature's voice was stilled,
I waited for her by the winding shore.
And where the poplars spread their leafage hoar
Saw her approach, with her familiar smile,
And in her pupils brown there flamed desire,
That might the heart of adamant beguile,
And woo to ecstasy with tender fire.
And, as I stretched my length beneath a tree,
Amid the thickets of the lonely lea,
I mused how in the Bible, we are told,
Of love, that won the daughters of mankind
To wed with angels in the days of old.
And how to the sons of God, with passion blind,
Came the fair daughters wantoning and wild,
And how these angels, with their faces mild,
Joined beauteous women in the sheltering grove,
And shared with them the deep delights of love.

IV.

But when the master slept, before the gate
At noon, he found the laundry desolate.
The hot sun smoked, like to a panting steer,
That labors with no sheltering shadow near.

But yet this drought was not so fierce, I thought,
As that which in my fevered senses wrought.
There was no sound, except a snatch of song
And laughter-peals of sots, stumbling along
From out the stews; except the frequent drip
Of water falling from the battered ship.
Now her lips show like jets of burning coal,
Whence those ecstatic kisses of the soul,
Like sparks from out a ruddy brazier start,
Till our two bodies faint and fall apart.
Nothing is heard except the cricket's cry—
  Those people of the sun, whose clamor passes
Across the meadows, when the sun is high,
  Like sound of crackling flame in withered grasses.
And we exchanged warm glances, in amaze
So pale, that each of us the other frays;
We read, in wrinkled features, and the track
Of lines 'neath feverish eyes, that is so black,
That ours was such a love as kills at last,
And life through every sense was ebbing fast.

We whispered, parting, that this eventide
We'd have no meeting at the water side.

But at that hour, a longing seized on me
To go alone to the accustomed tree.
To dream upon the beauties of her face,
And all our days of rapture to retrace,
And sleep on memories in that grassy place.
When drunk with recollections I came by,
She stood there, watching me as I drew nigh.

Then seized with feverish passion, we gave play
To acts of love that wore our love away.
Tho' death was gaining on us, longing bade
Our beings mingle in that evening shade.
Our passions were unchecked by thoughts of harm;
Our kindled looks were quenched by no alarm;
  Each for the other, at the point of death
Was lying; hollow chest, and dwindled arm
  Were forfeiting to us the fragrant breath
Of future kisses. Not a word we spoke;
And, by her side, the cry that from me broke
Was not the cry of love, but the wild call
That hot stags utter in the golden fall.
I ever felt the quiver of her frame
That filled me with fresh passion naught could tame.
And if I thirsted, as I raised that cry,
Her lips alone my thirst could satisfy.
And heat was whetted, strength was conquered quite,
In that embrace which was a mortal fight.
And even the shadowy turf on which we lay
Was withered, and the grasses burned away.
That place was easy to point out, we found,
Because our forms were stamped into the ground.

Some morning, while beneath that tree we bide
They'll take us up hard by the water's side,
They'll place us at the bottom of a boat,
And we'll embrace, as down the stream we float.
They'll dig some secret pit, and fling us in
As wretched people who have died in sin.

But, if 'tis true that spirits of the dead
Return, our shades that soft and grassy bed,
'Neath the tall poplars, still shall occupy;
And country people, as we hurry by,
Shall cross themselves, and mutter, "There they go,
The Death of Love, and her we used to know
Beating her linen, where the waters flow."

THE WILD GEESE

THE world is silent, from the thicket bare
No bird is warbling; but the plain is spread
Blank-white 'neath skies gray as the locks of care.
The great black crows come flocking with the day,
They dot the snow, raising a silvery dust,
And dig for carrion in the frozen crust.

A murmur from the horizon rises clear,
A clamor and brush of many a wing,—
Louder it grows, and the wild geese are here;
Their necks are stretched like arrows from the string.
In furious flight and sounding pinions strong,
They lash the gale that hurries them along.

The guide who leads these pilgrims of the air,
O'er forest lands, o'er ocean's foaming marge,
O'er yellow continents of desert bare,
Like to a trumpeter who leads a charge,
Utters from time to time a piercing cry,
That thrills the lagging cohorts of the sky.

Now, like a double pennon fluttering,
  Wavers and breaks the toiling caravan,
And that strange cry again is heard to ring;
  Now they deploy, like an unfolded fan;
And the great triangle appears to grow
Broader and ever broader as they go.

Their tame and captive brothers of the plain
  Stalk stiff and shivering o'er the pathway hard,
Full-paunched, like loaded vessels on the main;
  A whistling boy in ragged coat their guard.
And as the wild tribe of their kin draw near
With doubling cry—they raise their heads to hear.

Upon those freeborn travelers they gaze
  Tracking the cloudless ocean of the sky,
And captives, they, with sudden effort, raise
  Their wings, as if to join that company;
But those poor pinions are too weak to soar
And land the prisoners on freedom's shore.

And yet, they raise themselves tiptoe, and feel
  Vaguely the primal passion that had place,
Yet slept, in their heart's core roused by the appeal
  Of the wild wanderers, whom they grudge the space
Of heaven to range in, and the tropic shore,
Where smiles a tepid wave for evermore.

Ah, lost in those cold plains they wander still,
  Those plains of snow where they must ever tread
The dull low clod, nor mount with clarion shrill
  To liberty; and as they hear o'erhead
The call, they answer, with despairing cry,
Their wild free brethren of the boundless sky.

THE GRANDFATHER

THE grandfather was dying, he was cold
And rigid in his glazed and ghastly eye.
Six suns agone, he was fourscore years old.
His livid face was paling visibly;
White cheek, white scattered locks on withered head,—
White as the linen covering of his bed.

His large and pallid eye he opened wide;
And then he uttered words, in such a tone
They seemed as if across yon valley side,
They came, and now were softened to a moan;
Or like the woodland murmur, that we hear
When foliage quakes, altho' no storm is near.

Is this a memory stirs within me now?
Is it a dream my dying thoughts pursue?
The morn is laughing on the mountain brow;
With rising sap the trees their life renew;
My heart is beating with full crimson stream—
Is it a memory only or a dream?

Yes! life is sweet, but oh, how swift its flight!
How swift its flight, yet, I remember well
The days, that once I lived in long delight.
Those ancient days, the hours I loved so well,
When I was young,—and now my youth I deem,
Naught but a haunting memory or a dream.

Is it a memory stirs within me now,
Is it a dream my dying thoughts pursue?
Quivers the wave at faintest gusts that blow.
My breast would throb at every passion new.
Then like a torrent ran that ardent stream,
Is this a memory only or a dream?

A memory or a dream, oh, tell me—tell,
What is this breath that warms my heart of ice?
Now I remember, I remember well—
Youth, vigor, health, the gifts beyond all price,
Love, love, I do remember—well I deem
'Tis memory stirs my heart, and not a dream.

A memory or a dream—I dream no more.
Within my bosom I can hear the sound
Of billows beating on a lonely shore;
And my thought stumbles, as it flutters round
The glories of a half-forgotten day;
Then like a startled bird it speeds away.

Dreams of the new and memories of the old.
Is this the bright exordium of a new
Existence, that I see at last unfold?
Or memory of a life no longer true.
Death, Death—I do remember—Lay me, then,
Amid the dust of unremembered men.

DISCOVERY

I was a child, I loved to read of fight
And warfare, and the heavy coat of mail
Worn patiently by many a doughty knight.
I loved those paladins, who once set sail,
To wrest the Holy Sepulcher from hands
Of Paynims, and who died in foreign lands.

I loved that English Richard, at whose name
My young heart beat with ardor, when they told
How, on returning from the fields of fame,
He, for a necklace fashioned out of gold,
As links of his triumphant trophy, chose
The heads that he had smitten off from foes.

The Queen of Beauty gave, to deck my crest,
Her favor, and I dangled at my side
A cane for scimitar, and forth, in quest
Of some adventure, stepped with knightly pride;
And at the flowers, with valiant arm, I hewed;
And all the lawn with bud and blossom strewed.

And in the open air, a seat of stone
I covered with a mossy cushion green;
And this I counted as a royal throne.
I hated even kings who overween,
And, for a royal crown to deck my brow,
I chose a garland from a budding bough.

Ah! lapped in happiness the days went by;
And once a fair companion joined my side;
Nor was the maid reluctant to comply,
When my bright crown, my court, my kingdom wide
I offered her, and pointed o'er the main,
To all the castles I had built in Spain.

Beneath the chestnut-trees she took her seat;
And she was beautiful, and in her eye,
Liquid and blue and bright, I seemed to meet
Another universe, another sky;
And at her feet I sat the whole day long,
As if I listened to some dreamland song.

Ah, wherefore did I leave that cheerful place,
Why did I fling away the happiness
Of gazing on that maiden's tender face?
Why was Columbus filled with such distress,
When, thro' the fading vapors of the night,
He saw a new world rising into sight?

THE BIRDCATCHER

BIRDCATCHER love abroad is seen,
Soon as the winter's reign is o'er,
And all the coppices are green,
The lowland thickets to explore;
And when the evening shades the hill,
His cage the feathered captives fill.

As soon as night has left the sky,
And morning floods the quiet dale,
The birdcatcher comes hurrying by,
The snare to set, the treacherous trail
Of bird lime on the twig to smear,
And scatter oats and millet near.

Hid by the hedgerow does he lie,
He lurks behind the river's mound,
He glides beneath the thicket high,
Crawling all fours along the ground,
For fear his steps the foe betray
And scare the swift-winged birds away.

The cunning child his springs has set,
Where lilies of the valley blow;
When white-thorn still with dew is wet,
He lays his slender snare below,

And in the trap, at his sly call,
The finches and the linnets fall.

Sometimes a supple wand he takes
  Of osier green or rosemary,
With which a cunning snare he makes,
  And watches—until downward fly
The birds that see his scattered grain:
Alas, they fly not back again.

A little bird, on rapid wing,
  Comes cheerfully toward the net,
He eyes it frank and wondering,
  His daring leads him nearer yet:
The treacherous grain without a thought
Of fraud he tastes, and he is caught.

Birdcatcher love no pity shows
  But takes him from the woodland wide,
From all the native haunts he knows,
  Thick bush, and bank, and waterside;
And when the evening shades the hill,
A cage the feathered songsters fill.

LONGINGS

Some wish for wings to mount into the sky,
And with glad shouts to soar through boundless space;
With the cloud-sweeping swallow would they fly,
Until the evening gloom their forms efface.

And some desire to batter on the breast
Of others, raising up their fists to hit,
And by the nose the flying steed arrest,
Without the aid of bridle or of bit.

The beauty of the body I desire;
I would be fair as some divinity
Of Greece, that, at my view, a flame of fire
Should kindle in fond hearts, and never die.

And I in every tender breast would reign,
And change each day my object of delight;
And every morn a different fruit obtain;
A different fancy to my heart unite.

For when we taste them, fruits have different flavors;
The blonde and the brunette a different grace,
On all alike I would bestow my favors,
And each should reign in her peculiar place.

Kind glances in the squares, without offense
I sometimes, in a tender moment, meet;
I rather like it that no permanence
Clings to these fleeting conquests of the street.

Altho' I love to sit with a brunette,
When earnest feeling in her face appears,
Still the mild blonde, we never must forget,
Has soft blue eyes, bright hair, and ready tears.

So without serious thoughts of womankind,
I go wherever fancy bids me start,
I pluck the fruit, but scarcely pierce the rind,
Lest I find something bitter at the heart.

THE LAST ESCAPADE

I.

THERE stood an ancient castle, begirt with lofty walls
And tottering was the flight of steps that led into its halls.
And grass o'ergrew the pavement, and moss o'erspread the stone,—
As if with scales of leprosy the place was overgrown.
And two strong towers the castle flanked, the one with pointed crown;
But, from the other, roof and tile for years had fallen down.
The tempest raged against that wall, the gale with fury blew,
And with a crash the tottering peak its fury overthrew.
And now the climbing ivy, that to that ruin clung
Like some fair lady's crown of locks in verdant beauty hung.
And when the rain came down from heaven, into that turret's flank,
Its gaps and seams, with secret flow, the falling water sank.

And there, as from a gaping wound, there sprang a
mighty tree,
And through that fissure in the wall, the traveler might
see
The ancient chambers veiled in gloom, the walls with
hangings rent,
The armored knights that stood a-row, as in a dun-
geon pent.
The windows of the castle were blank and gray, and
dim;
They seemed like eyeballs in the face of warriors gray
and grim.
And all the gloomy building was tumbling to decay,
It was a blackened ruin, that soon must pass away.
Across its front the molding ran like wrinkles on a
face;
No footing could be trusted in that neglected place;
The very tiles upon the roof in shattered ruin lie;
And many an ancient chamber stands open to the sky.
There's ruin writ on every stone; there, desolation
now
Has stamped its brand, like marks of shame upon
some caitiff brow.

Around the walls a gloomy park extends its shade
profound;
The sunlight of the summer noon can never reach
that ground;
Yet those who travel through the grove at times,
when tempests rave,
May hear the foliage rustling like the murmur of the
wave,

The wave that calmly beats along some desolated shore,
Where boatmen and where shipmen are busy nevermore,
But where the distant ocean stands glittering to the view,
With placid sunlight beating down from out a heaven of blue.
That forest, with its thickset trees, whose branches intertwine,
Can ne'er receive the showers of light that on the ocean shine.
The morning has no entrance to those avenues of shade;
And 'neath the giants of the grove the bushes droop and fade.
But like a vast cathedral, the verdant vault expands;
The odor of the tomb is there, for there no human hands
Have cleared the stagnant hollows that gather festering there,
And yet the solemn silence hears not the voice of prayer.

And yet upon the gallery-steps, from which the traveler sees
The spreading lawns that far away are hemmed by towering trees;
Two aged serving men are seen, supporting by their side
A bent and feeble couple, whom down the steps they guide.

Yes, softly down the mossy steps, each day they lead
the twain,
Whose tottering limbs and feeble feet can scarce the
toil sustain.
But with their sticks before them they seek the path
to find.
And vacantly they stagger with gesture of the blind;
Right ancient seem the stately pair, their foreheads
lined with age;
Their withered skins and pointed chins are like some
old-time page,
Some antique page of history, that tells what mighty
power
Can keep the sacred flame of life bright to its latest
hour.
And now they sink all wearied each on the soft settee;
Their heads and hands are trembling, their eyes but
dimly see.
With drooping lids they do not turn to the wild
scene around,
But in dull languor fix their sight upon the mossy
ground.
Their thoughts no longer onward range, they do not
blame the fate
That sets them, like two trembling leaves, in winter
desolate,
And if they still survive the grave, 'tis like two
columns tall,
That each against the other leans, lest both together fall,
And silently they sit, nor speak; for word of bliss or
bane
Has never passed, year after year, between the hapless
twain.

II.

But now across the distant plain a breath of fire is spread;
The trees in every trembling trunk are rising from the dead.
And o'er their ruffled coronets the sunlight seems to glide,
And the flood of heat arises like the flowing of the tide.
And over every meadow a gilded robe appears,
The butterflies are dancing along those grassy spears.
The distant country rises clad in a garb of gray;
And many hovering murmurs upon the horizon play;
And in the bosom of the turf the crickets sing their lay.
The fever of the fiery day is sinking, and, once more,
The ancient walls grow young again and in that light are gay.
They take again the gleaming front they showed in days of yore,
The very stones are smiling above that battered door.

That aged man and woman with fresher life respire;
Their twinkling eyes new luster gain from that fierce bath of fire.
Their withered limbs new vigor take, and in their veins there run
The torrents of a life renewed beneath the blazing sun.

Confused as if a sudden call had wakened them from sleep
Amazed they listen, and they hear the noises shrill and deep.
They raise their heads and on their canes with withered hands they lean,
The old man to his consort turns, and speaks with eye serene,
He turns and looks upon her face, "The day is fine," he cries.
And at his voice she raises her dim and drowsy eyes
And answers him, "The glorious days once more have come again."
And their voice is like the shrilly cry of flocks upon the plain;
And spring's eternal gladness with smiles their faces wreathes,
And they feel the forest odors the wind of summer breathes.
It stirs them as a draught of wine acts on a feeble brain;
They tremble at that vivid shock, as if it brought them pain.
They gently nod with mutual glance, their looks fly to and fro,
Until they feel in that sweet air the spring of long ago.
And suddenly she speaks to him, while sobs her utterance choke,
"'Twas on a day like this that first we met by yonder oak."
Then silence sinks upon the twain, but bitter thoughts of ruth
Return to them with memories of half-forgotten youth.

Return, as two stout vessels, that homeward voyage take,
With swelling sails and foaming prows follow their earliest wake.
He answered her, "'Tis long ago, those days can ne'er return,—
And then,—our bench of stone that yonder stood, knee-deep in fern."
The woman quails, as if a stab she felt above her heart,
"Come let us visit it once more," with choking voice she said.
And with a sudden effort they rise, as from the dead,
And down the winding avenue with tottering steps they start.

They were two strange companions, that couple pale and old,
He with his ancient hunting coat, with buttons of pure gold;
She, moving by her husband's side, a figure grim and tall,
Wrapped in the flowery patterns that marked her antique shawl.

III.

They watched their opportunity, that none might see their flight;
And then with bent and crooked forms they started with delight.

They felt ashamed, that they were old, when all
around was new,
And hand in hand like children their tottering way
pursue;
And, staggering on uncertain feet, they barred the
avenue.
For each, as though with wine overcome, against
the other pressed,
And in a zigzag line they went; while on their sticks
they rest
Their withered hands, and hurrying on they walked
toward the seat.
The sticks kept pace beside them as if two wooden
feet.

And after many a stop, they reached, all breathless
with their haste,
The park, the ample promenade, now a deserted waste.
Their past woke up and led them adown those alleys
green;
And on that humid soil they saw, beneath the sky
serene,
The footprints fresh which they had left in those old
loving days,
As if the paths preserved them still to their eternal
praise.
As if the paths expected still to see the amorous pair
Steal from the blooming thicket and breathe the
scented air.
All weak and shrunken now beneath those towering
trees they stole;
Lost in the tangled labyrinth of mighty bough and bole,
Where an eternal evening brought sadness to the soul;

Then as if searching ancient books from text to margin wide,
While one asserted "It is here," "'Tis there," the other cried.
"And was it here I kissed your hand?" "Yes, 'tis the very spot,
Here lips were joined." "Ah, that," he said, "I never have forgot."
And so their pilgrimage went on, each kiss a shrine had made;
Like crosses on the journey of pilgrims on crusade.
And thus as through the forest the laboring pathway led,
They touched on happy moments, that from their gaze had fled;
Excursions of the heart were these, toward bliss that had its end;
They thought again that arm in arm they through the forest wend,
With eyes that spoke of mutual love, with fingers intertwined,
In silence, but with beating heart and fever of the mind:
Alas! within the wood they heard the moaning of the wind.

IV.

Yet there the bench awaited them, crumbling and mossy brown.
"'Tis here," he said, "Here" echoed she, and then they sat them down.

And 'neath the warm reflections cast by memories of delight,
The darkness of the mantling grove grew for a moment bright.
But lo, they saw approaching as flattened by some load,
And wrinkled by his hundred years, the old familiar toad.
With parted feet across their path the reptile seemed to stalk,
Like to a staggering infant that has not learned to walk.
A sudden sob their bosom shook, and ended in a moan;
For ah! their earliest vows of love were heard by him alone.
Each evening would he issue forth to listen to their word,
And he alone remembered the tender vows he heard.
And now he hastens to them with dull and patient gait,
His belly rounds before them, his eyes in wonder wait.
And now against the trembling feet of the long faded pair,
He gently leans his bloated bulk and fondly nestles there.
And then they wept; but suddenly the warbling music clear
Of some shy songster of the grove struck on their listening ear.
Ah me, they quiver with delight, for well the strain they know,
'Twas the same chant they listened to just eighty years ago.

Then in the wild confusion of a supreme delight;
The days of long ago came back and shone upon
their sight.
Like to a boiling torrent that swells with rising tide;
They see their life, their happiness, their passion
multiplied.
The long caresses of the night that lasted until day;
And the sweet wakenings of the morn forever passed
away;
And then the evenings that they spent beneath some
flickering shade;
The odors of the forest; the turf of the arcade;
Where kisses came until they reached, where myriad
alleys meet,
And wearied sank once more upon that old familiar
seat.

But as these tender thoughts prevailed they saw the
opening lane
And down it swept the frolic breeze from the far dis-
tant plain.
With scented wings it fanned their cheek, as in those
ancient moods,
And it brought back to them again the springtime of
the woods!

And then they felt the flush of youth their withered
cheeks o'erspread.
And trembling seized their frames, their hands joined
like the newly wed,
And then they looked with passion each to the other's
face,
Each as if ready at one smile, the other to embrace.

But never smile those faces showed, for foreheads
clear and white,
Appeased the gloom of sorrow and age's sallow blight.
And all they saw to call to life the passions that were
dead,
Were two old countenances, each with wrinkles over-
spread.
And each beheld presented an antiquated face
Crumpled in smiles of passion, with hideous grimace.
They closed their eyes, they fainting sank, as if they
fell beneath
The overwhelming terror that comes with instant
death.
"Come," said the husband, "let us now toward our
home retreat."
But they were powerless to rise and stand upon their
feet.
Fixed as their stony bench were they, and doubly
terrified,
To think that they had wandered from their attend-
ant's side;
To feel themselves so feeble, so aged, and so lone,
And rigid, that they held their seat like people turned
to stone.
Then from that quiet resting place, they rose with
sudden might,
And down the verdant alley they rushed in fevered
flight.

They whined and moaned in their distress, and like
a shower of rain
A frigid horror struck their bones and chilled them
with the pain.

And then they seemed to strangle, struck by a frozen
breath,
Like to the currents that stream forth from musty
caves of death,
Where they have festered centuries old, beneath the
crumbling mound,
And on their hearts a heavy weight seemed bearing
to the ground.
All their poetic dreams might be no more than leaden
weights,
Hindering their struggling efforts to reach the castle
gates.
And 'neath the burden of their dreams, on limbs with
journeying spent,
Adown the leafy avenue they staggered as they went.

V.

The wife was first to yield before the labor of the way,
And like a broken spring she snapped, and on the
ground she lay.
And he stood upright at her side, waiting to see her rise;
And knew not that the mists of death were settling
o'er her eyes.
Yet he was restless, for he thought she was o'ertired
and weak;
For her dress trembled as she lay, although she did
not speak.
But all at once he seemed to know the meaning of
her fall.
And on him rushed the stroke of fear, swift as a
sudden squall;

Then he stooped down, and with fond hand, he seized
her skinny arm;
And raised her with prodigious pain, although his face
was calm;
But the poor body limply hung, a miserable sight;
He saw that she was dying, and ne'er would see the
night.
He ran to seek assistance and struggled on his feet,
With frightful and contorted limbs; but ah, his course
was fleet.
He bounded in a gallop, his stick made out the way;
And limping, sidling, twisting, he left the leafy way;
And, as amid the labyrinth of tangled paths he wound,
His breath came thick and short and hard and had a
coughing sound;
And then his trembling limbs gave way and toward
the ground they bent,
He seemed to dance upon his knees and like a frog
he went,
And as he hopped, he struck against the black trunks
of the dell.
The very trees made sport of him and pushed him
till he fell.
And one would thrust him back again against the
other tree;
And at his agony they seemed to laugh with coward
glee.
He knew at last the struggle was coming to an end;
And, like a shipwrecked mariner upon the billows,
bend,
Who, e'er he drowns, shrieks one appeal to the un-
pitying sky,
Falling upon his face he made one faint complaining cry.

So feeble was that utterance, the very wind disdained
To bear it from the grassy path where sullen silence reigned.
And yet he listened, as he lay upon that pallet low,
In mournful intonation to the cawing of a crow.
And mingled with that dismal note, which echoed like a knell,
There came the dead and rattling sound flung by a broken bell.
Then every noise to silence sank; the forest's icy gloom
Pressed down upon them heavy as the covering of a tomb.

VI.

And there they lay, while from the day died the last streak of light;
And all the sky was heaving with the tempest swell of night.
And there they lay, all crumpled like heaps of leaves that lie
Rustling beneath the eddying gust, when snow is in the sky,
So dimly seen amid the gloom, one scarce would think them there;
And the home-returning cattle pass by them with a stare.
While others, on their evening path, unheeding tread them down,
As if they were mere blocks that formed the pavement in a town.

The little snails crawl over them, and leave their slime behind,
And in the folded garments, that wrap their bodies round,
The swarms of insects nestle and cozy shelter find,
And others, thinking they are dead, light on the mortal mound.

But a sudden shudder passes through the forest avenue;
And a shower comes down, and lashes the leaves of oak and yew.
And clattering, rippling, falls upon the soil, like a cascade;
And on that aged pair, whose dress still flutters in the shade,
The rain descends with heavy drops in night-long fusillade.
And when the first faint light of dawn the ghastly drama sees,
Beneath the ceaseless dripping from the branches of the trees,
They raise from that green resting-place two bodies small and cold,
With faces grim and rigid, which dripping locks enfold,
Like two drowned sailors by the waves up to the land-wash rolled.

SONG OF THE MOONLIGHT

WRITTEN FOR A NOVEL

KNOWEST thou my name? 'Tis Moonlight. Whence I spring?
Look up, and see my mother glittering,
While night itself is dusky as a cave.
I climb the tree, and glide along the wave.
I lie upon the grass and tread the sands;
I scale a gloomy wall, and lightly perch
Upon the bole of many a slender birch;
All I surmount, like a marauder bold
And I am never hot and never cold.
I am so small that I can glide
Where no one else could go beside;
Close to the pane I press my nose,
And many a secret I disclose;
The beasts that thro' the forest stray,
And lovers who with mournful face
Choose the cool shadows for their way,
Follow my bright and flickering face,
And find their love returned. And when
I vanish in the realms of space,
The grateful throbbing hearts of men

Do not my boundless gifts forget,
But feel a pang of keen regret.

The nightingale and thrush
For me, in every bush,
Sing, in their song divine,
The elm-trees and the pine.
I love to show my power
Where burrowing rabbits scour;
For each, at my behest,
At once forsakes his nest,
And all begin to play
Upon the bright highway.
From many a dingle deep
I wake the deer from sleep;
And, at my warning glow,
The restless, anxious doe
Scents in the silent air
The hunter with his snare.
Or hears the distant call
Of stag with antlers tall,
To whom my silvery glance
Prompts thoughts of dalliance.

My mother guides
The foaming tides;
And then I rise;
On every strand
I take my stand,
With glittering eyes.
In forest glade,
I slumber bring
To sap and spring.

My sudden gleam,
In hollow ways,
To those dismayed
A sword may seem.

And dreams I give
To those who live
In joyous mood;
To those who brood
In sore distress,
Some happiness.

Knowest thou my name? 'Tis Moonlight! Knowest thou why
I come so gladly from the lofty sky?
Beneath the trees the night was dark and gray,
And thou could'st fleeting glide the watery way,
Stray thro' the woods, and wander on the shore;
Strike on the birch trunk when the day was o'er.
I wish to point to thee the passageway,
And that is why I visit thee to-day.

A WALK AT SIXTEEN

THE earth was smiling; and the sky was blue;
Still to the verdant grass the dew was clinging.
The world was filled with music, and I, too,
Felt a soft music in my heart was ringing;
A throstle in the thicket out of view
Sang loud, but did he twit me in his singing?
I cared not what the saucy fellow meant;
For I was filled with infinite content.

Our people were at odds, from morning tide
Till night they quarreled; I could not say why;
She gathered posies, walking at my side.
I climbed a mossy bank, that I might lie
Close at her feet. Before us, we descried
A ruddy mountain height, that seemed to die
Away in sunlight to the horizon's brim,
And there it lost itself in shadows dim.

She said: "Look at that mount, this hillock bare,
And the ravine that stops the traveler's way."
I only saw that she was very fair.
Then she began a merry roundelay;
I liked her voice much better than the air.
And then we found we must not longer stay
In idle dallying, or we would be late
Crossing the wood that ended at our gate.

A sapling elm had fallen across our track;
I ran and raised, and arched it high in air;
The leaves hung o'er that dome, as I held back
The springing trunk, and she passed smiling there;
The pretty child! And then there was no lack
Of looks, and timid starts, as though aware
Of some sweet intimacy, and we gazed around,
At our own feet, and on the humid ground!

And all the summer fields around were stilled;
Sometimes, without a word, she raised her eyes;
And then, it seemed to me, that we were filled
With thoughts that tender glances bid arise;
Thoughts those young hearts of ours were better skilled
To speak than human tongue, however wise;
And our hearts said, that day, in the green wood,
Things that we dared not utter if we could.

A PROTEST

WHAT sort of man your spouse is,
I can't tell!
That he is fat and coarse, is
undisputed;
The spouse of her I die for may be
— well!
One-eyed, or bandy-legged, or e'en
clubfooted.
The stupid, harmless man will not repel
A friend of yours — if short, he is well
suited
To stand between us; we have naught to
dread —
Our love-making goes on above his head!

It seems to me, however, that to-day
You are somewhat capricious, and you make
Mention of oaths and vows that you must pay.
You tell me that remorse your heart would break—
You, young and lovely and aspiring, pray,
What path in life were you ordained to take?
'Twas surely not to languish day and night
With naught but this baboon for your delight!

And would you one remorseful moment find
Spring from deceiving this misshapen lout?
This eunuch, as I think, in flesh and mind,
For verily, I have a nervous doubt,
Whether he'll leave a progeny behind!
Look how his bead-like eyes pop in and out!
His legs are short and stunted, and his chest
Sinks in the gulf of that surprising vest!

He is a man whom nothing seems to please;
At dinner ties his napkin round his neck,
To keep his shirt front safe from drops of grease!
And yet he lets the snuff his linen speck.
In drawing-rooms he is never at his ease;
If nothing comes his early flight to check,
He seeks the kitchen fire, and snugly, there,
Snores over his digestion in a chair.

He smugly still repeats his little jokes,
He calls you "Pussy" and "his little pet."
And when there's a dispute, he likes the folks
To make him arbiter, that he may win
Some credit from it; doubtless by such strokes,
He gained the Cross, and many an epithet,
"Good," "Kindly," "Solid," yet he'll chuck the chin
Of cook or housemaid when his wife's not in!

He checks the grocery bill, and darns his hose;
He puts the candle out when you're in bed.
Tho' he may love you also, I suppose,
His love of gain is more to him than bread.
A donkey knows more Homer than he knows
Of your true nature, so that, if I said

To him I loved you, he'd not think it mattered—
But probably consider himself flattered!

Blow and inflate this dummy gendarme made,
Of leather!—scarecrow, set to drive away
The lover, as a puppet is displayed
To scare the birds from fruit-trees. For one day,
Not longer, are the little birds afraid!—
When in my arms your head at last you lay,
Let him stand up between us, and our first
Embrace will cause this wind-blown man to burst.

LOVE'S ENDING

THE gay sun lit the fields, and day was new;
And soft caresses, under the calm shade
Of leaves, were multiplied; each flower, where dew
Still sparkled, of its cup an offering made
To dazzling insects, who their suit renew
To sip the sweetness in that store-house laid.
Large butterflies, on velvet petals sinking,
Drank nectar there, and shook their wings while drinking.

'Twas hard to say, which was the living thing;
The insect seemed an animated flower;
And calls of tenderness came on the wing
Of breezes, in that tepid morning hour;
And each to other creatures seemed to cling
In love, and in the midst of the fresh bower,—
The crimson mist that comes with rising morn,—
The love song of the pairing larks was borne.

The haughty stallions their passions neighed;
While little rabbits, with a pirouette,
Leaped as the offering of their heart they made.
An amorous joy, like a strong, dazzling jet
Of fragrance, was expanding thro' the glade;
It grew to the horizon, till it met
A myriad hearts, and then at last, these broke
Into the music that the welkin woke.

And in the gloom of hospitable boughs,
Where tiny peoples have their habitation,
Where creatures, like to grains of dust, carouse;
Whose forms escape our eyes' investigation;
To whom the very bud in which they browse,
Is the vast kingdom of a countless nation;
These two had their caresses, and were prancing
Like motes along a bar of sunlight dancing.

And two young lovers on a path were wending,
Which tranquil led thro' wheat-fields of the plain;
Not arm in arm, not hand in hand, but bending
Vexed eyes upon the ground. He did not deign
To look upon the land, and she was tending
Toward a bank, where she to sit was fain.
"The truth," she said, "can be no longer hid;
You do not love me now, as once you did."

"Is that my fault?" he asked; and by her side
He sat him; and the minds of both were tossed
On waves of reverie, wandering far and wide.
"A year!" she cried, "To think that all is lost

In one short year! Eternal Love has died
Earlier, I think, than in the case of most.
Yet still your words re-echo in my ear,
And, ah! your past caresses still are dear!

"What is it can have changed you in one day?
You kissed me yester-morn, my love; your hand,
If now it chance to touch me, shrinks away.
Why can I from your lips no more command
A kiss? Reply, if you have aught to say."
He answered, "Think you I can understand?"
And then she met his eye, as if perusing
Some sign, that might declare what he was musing.

"Oh, do you not remember—why forget?—
How once you kissed me, and how each caress
Brought a wild throb that lingers with me yet?"
He answered in a tone of weariness,
Rolling with listless hand a cigarette,
And rising from his seat, "All this distress
Is useless; what you mention now is o'er.
Why speak of days that can return no more?"

Then slowly they proceed, with forehead bent,
And idly dangling arms; and in her throat
The sobs were swelling, while her heart-beats sent
Hot tears to gem the lashes where they float.
Two doves rose from the barley, as they went,
Frayed into flight, and coo'd with joyous note.
Beneath their feet, o'er azure sky, o'er all,
Love was enthroned and kept high festival.

Long the winged lovers in the heavens kept wheeling.
A lad, upon his way to work, was chanting
A merry song, that touched the tender feeling
Of a young farm lass, who rushed, red and panting,
From the green shade, in which she had been kneeling,
To meet him. But our couple both were wanting
In speech. He seemed in irritable mood
And eyed her sidelong, till they reached a wood.

Upon the herbage of a path, athwart
The grass still bright and fresh, the sunlight fell
In patches at their feet. They had no heart
To note the natural charms they knew so well.
Then she broke down, panting beneath the smart
Of sorrows that her heart indignant swell,
And, toward the foot of a tall tree-trunk creeping,
Burst into storms of mingled sobs and weeping.

He waited for a time in hushed surprise,
Hoping that soon she would her tears control,
While from his lips long clouds of smoke arise;
He watched them vanishing, as they unroll,
Stamped with his foot, and said with stony eyes;
"Leave off! Enough of all this rigmarole!
I will not quarrel with you, and these tears
Are foolish in a person of your years."

"Leave me to weep alone, and go!" she said,
Uplifting to him eyes in tear-drops drowned.
"Oh how my heart is raptured, tho' dismayed,
And tortured! Why should souls by love be bound

One day, and not for life? Why should love fade
And hearts cease loving? I am faithful found
To you, and still I love you more and more—
But you'll ne'er love me as you loved before!"

He answered her, "Yet I can naught avail.
'Tis thus our mortal life has been ordained;
And every joy below must some day fail;
And bliss is fleeting. I have ne'er maintained
That love of mine should last until the tale
Of years was told for us. Love rose and reigned
And abdicated, but when true love ends,
Lovers may sometimes ripen into friends.

"And after this hard passage, may not we
The sweet serene affection cultivate
To which 'tis best old lovers should agree?"
And then he tried to raise her, as she sate
Sobbing and sad—"Alas, you do not see
How women scorned live ever desolate."
And then she wrung her hands in bitter pain,
"My God! My God!" she cried, and wept again.

And he, with not a single word, looked on,
Then after a long pause he said, "I'll go,
You will not cease your folly." He was gone.
And she sat lonely there, and weeping low.
Legions of birds raised, in a joyful tone,
A storm of music; and, her tale of woe
Forsaking, Philomel was gay; her throat
Seemed dropping pearls with every liquid note.

And from the glittering foliage, many a strain
Was warbled forth and, like a hautboy soft,
The linnet trilled, and throstles piped amain;
And, in the intervals, the finches oft
Added their little chirp to the refrain.
Some doves from out the lofty boughs descend,
And standing on the pathway in a ring
Were wooing, open-billed, with quivering wing.

She felt through all the landscape, wood and wold,
A breath was moving, tender, yet with fire
And fragrance loaded, and its presence told
Of purest love and natural desire,
Purged in a furnace like refined gold;
She, looking up, as if she would aspire
To love's ideal in a brighter land,
Murmured, "Men are too base to understand."

A STREET CHAT

WHEN on the boulevard I take a stroll,
How often have I heard, to vex my soul,
Two *decorés,* who smiling as they meet,
Talk nothing else but nonsense in the street.

FIRST DECORÉ

What, is it you?

SECOND DECORÉ

What chance has brought you out?

FIRST DECORÉ

How is your health?

SECOND DECORÉ

You see I get about;
But how are you?

FIRST DECORÉ

Ah! well I can't complain.

SECOND DECORÉ

What glorious weather after so much rain!

FIRST DECORÉ

I think, if it continues to be bright,
We'll have a splendid summer.

SECOND DECORÉ

You are right.

FIRST DECORÉ

To-morrow, I shall start for my estate,
To rest a little, and recuperate.

SECOND DECORÉ

Your change will do you good.

FIRST DECORÉ

My lilac-tree
Is blooming later far than formerly;
The air is feverish and the nights are chill.

SECOND DECORÉ

You see how red the moon is? Do you still
Enjoy your fishing?

FIRST DECORÉ

Yes, 'tis pretty fair.

SECOND DECORÉ

What further news has come of that affair?

FIRST DECORÉ

There's nothing new.

SECOND DECORÉ

And how's her ladyship?

FIRST DECORÉ

She's well, but for a little touch of grippe.

SECOND DECORÉ

It seems this grippe is spreading, tell me pray
What's your opinion of Machin's new play?

FIRST DECORÉ

I have not seen it. What is said of it?

SECOND DECORÉ

A *fiasco,* though it might have proved a hit,
But it was far too labored. Now, Sardou
Is not like that, his work is swift and true,
And strong.

FIRST DECORÉ

O yes, Sardou is very strong.

SECOND DECORÉ

Machin works hard, but then his method's wrong.
That's well enough, if one a volume write;
In reading books, the toil and labor quite
Escape our notice, but a play, a play—
Should sound like conversation of the day.

FIRST DECORÉ

You make me think, dear sir, of Feuillet,
That's prose for you!—but book-hacks of our day—
Disgusting!—but, I've little time to read.
The daily paper, now, is all I need.

SECOND DECORÉ

The paper, and—the fair sex!—

[Then they grin
Pleased to confess a fashionable sin.]

SECOND DECORÉ

And not the table?

FIRST DECORÉ

No!—at least, I'm free
From the disgusting vice of gluttony.

SECOND DECORÉ

And politics—the business of the nation—

FIRST DECORÉ

Such subjects are my only consolation
In life.

SECOND DECORÉ

To seek alone the nation's weal,
And dedicate your life its ills to heal,
Is certainly a great and noble aim.
We in the Chamber have some men of fame
As orators.

FIRST DECORÉ

Yes, they are very strong.

SECOND DECORÉ

Since Thiers and Changarnier are gone,
Few such great thunderers to our side belong;
They've left us legal quibblers alone.
But apropos of reading, do you read
This Zola?

FIRST DECORÉ

A mere mud heap!

SECOND DECORÉ

Yes, indeed.
And then we hear complaints that things are dear!
That fraud and trickery and theft appear!
Such writings sap the morals of the land.
What are we coming to?

FIRST DECORÉ

Alas! good-bye,
Dear sir, I'm in a hurry, and must fly.

SECOND DECORÉ

Good-bye, my compliments to Madame, pray.

FIRST DECORÉ

I thank you, my respects I wish you'd pay
To your fair daughter.

[Then they go their way,
And the priests tell us such have souls divine;
That if there is in human life a sign,
That God man's place did o'er the beasts ordain,
It is, that thought and reason rule his brain;
That light and progress o'er his history reign,
Yet long as this old world of ours existed
Has idle, human silliness persisted.
If ever choice for me should hesitate,
Between a bull-calf's and a man's estate,
I think my reason quickly would dictate,
That far superior, on every plea,
Is silence to long-tongued stupidity.]

A RUSTIC VENUS

THE gods are all eternal, among us
They spring to birth, as in old Italy,
Though men no longer give them serious
Observance, as of yore; and when
they die,
The people bury them with face serene,
And quite forget that they have ever
been.

New gods shall yet be born, and those
who last
Arise shall reign above the noisy crowd,
No matter who gainsays. It is not past—
That grand Herculean age; the clamor loud
That greets the conqueror in his red career
Sees but another demigod appear.

And this old earth, with all its varied face,—
Spring with its garlands, and its tresses green,
Summer, the time of love for every race,
And placid autumn with its golden sheen,
And winter resting time for all,—has might
To bring a score of Venuses to light.

I.

Full sunlight beat upon a boundless shore,—
A fisherman, who bore upon his back,
Along the foaming line where billows roar,
The osier-woven burden of his pack,
Heard at his feet, from the low sandy plain,
The sobs of some one in distress or pain.

There he discerned an infant, on the ground,
Abandoned evidently, cast away
Naked and unprotected—therefore bound
To be the bitter floodtide's easy prey;
It might have been the luckless progeny
Of the eternal kiss of sand and sea.

He dried the salt dew from its satin skin,
And in his pack he placed the dainty prize,
And round it wrapped his nets of meshes thin,
And bore it off triumphant in surprise.
Like to a rocking bark upon the deep,
His light pack swayed and lulled the babe to sleep.

Along the shore he went, until he grew
A dim and indistinguishable dot,
And then the horizon opened and withdrew
His form; and from the blank and lonely spot,
Whence he had started, his bare foot-prints made
Over the sand, a dwindling, endless braid.

The child thus found became a general pet
The country round; and often there was strife
Who first should have the privilege to set
A kiss on that small form, a rose of life,
Upon that dimpled waist so soft and fair,
Upon those tiny arms, forever bare.

For she would offer to each visitor
Those little rounded arms for their delight
As if a kiss was happiness to her;
And, when she saw them ravished at the sight
Of her own beauty, then her joy would trace
Smile after smile upon her chubby face.

When she at last was old enough to go
Into the crowded alley of the street,
Struggling to step and swaying to and fro,—
The women issued forth, and rushed to meet
Her coming with acclaim, and all were wild
To gaze upon the beauty of the child.

In later years, in rags was she bedight—
A scanty garb, exposing molded knee,
And tapering ankle, for she bounded light
As mountain chamois, and as fair and free,
Through grasses reaching to her lips, for hours
Chasing the butterflies among the flowers.

Her cheeks attracted a fond kiss from all,
She was a flower, that lures the flying troop
To light upon its dazzling coronal,
And in the fields, the boys she met would stoop

And clasp her little head with fond embrace;
And gaze enraptured on her lovely face.

And they would kiss her with the same wild, rare,
  Ecstatic tremor, as a man may feel,
When first his mistress yields her shoulder bare
  To his caresses, and the old would steal
Their arms about her, dance her on their knee,
Until she laughed aloud, in childish glee.

The old!—with withered arms about her waist—
  Would flush with memory of forgotten days;
And once again that vivid rapture taste
  Which through those ancient hours of sweetness
    plays.
And casting down their eyes, for tears were there,
Touch with their wrinkled lips that fragrant hair.

Soon thro' the public roads her way she took;
  Not lonely, for about her ever went
A troop of lads, who had their home forsook;
  And every truant, every malcontent,
Was found her growing company among,
For with a word she conquered old and young.

From morn till eve, with tireless steps, she sped.
  Drawing this wandering cohort in her train,
As by the spell of love their hearts she led;
  And while they strove her kisses to obtain,
And their yet budding passions to assuage,
They did not shrink from acts of brigandage.

And some, as soon as night her veil had spread,
Went forth and climbed the walls of many a yard,
And stole the garden apples ripe and red,
Fearless of those who had been placed on guard,
Of furious dogs who raise the loud alarm,
Or bludgeon wielded by an angry arm.

And others toiled for some less dangerous prize,
And set their snares to catch the lark or linnet,
And brought a cageful, pleased at her surprise
To see a throstle or a bullfinch in it;
And boldly, in their quests for gifts like these,
They'd climb from branch to branch the loftiest trees.

Shrimp-fishing was her favorite diversion;
She'd stand barelegged in shallows of the deep,
And cast her net, and with supreme exertion,
Pull out some wriggling creature at a sweep;
While in the limpid flood, her comrades see,
The trembling contours of her leg and knee.

When night upon their homeward path was stealing,
Stopping midway upon the shelving shore,
They'd crowd and kiss her in a burst of feeling;
And ever she, with resignation, bore
Their hot caresses, and stood calm and mute,
Offering her tender cheek for the salute.

II.

Her charms did well her loving-kindness suit.
And as she grew in years, her beauty's grace
Grew finer, till she ripened, like a fruit
Whose fragrance fills with life the dwelling-place.
Her hair, a tint of gold, that seemed laid on a
Red background, as in Titian's Madonna.

The hardy sun upon her neck and face,
The open pastures and the breezes warm,
With little specks of fire had left their trace;
And, with soft light, had dappled every charm.
Her swelling breasts a robe did scarce confine;
They curved in rising mounds her bodice line.

All dresses seemed becoming, when she wore them;
They found her supple lines could dominate
Whatever drapery a whim threw o'er them;
Proud as a queen in glittering robes of state,
She envied not the rich their raiment rare,
Tho' she was envied that her face was fair.

A cloven upper lip, a cloven chin,
Lips that were often parted to disclose
The pearly line of teeth that lay within
That waving barrier of trembling rose.
Blue, thoughtful eyes which so with love could dance
That some men would have died for one fond glance.

For when men saw her coming, they would flock
Before her, if but once to catch her eye;
And she would smile, feeling the fiery shock
Of passion from those sparkling pupils fly.
The fanning of her garments, as she passed,
Was to their vain desire a furnace blast.

Her very rags showed somewhat the disdain
Her beauty felt for ornament; her mien
So artless was, so kind, it made more plain
That noble mind of princess or of queen,
Which under such a humble garb was hid;
There something noble was in all she did.

And people said of her, not only where
She lived, but wide the neighboring country round,
That all who looked upon that figure rare
Were afterward her faithful followers found;
To touch her hand, and linger at her side,
Would make men constant to her till they died.

In the hard winter days, when keenest frost
Can penetrate the thickest cottage wall
To people in their beds, and snows are tossed
By tempest, in the hollow roads to fall,
Shadows are seen around her window sill
At nightfall, and the horizon pale and still,

Is checkered by these phantoms of the night
Who prowl like wolves about her dwelling-place.
And in the summer time, when skies are bright,
And merry harvesting goes on apace,

And dark-armed reapers in the wheat are lined,
And the blue flax flower shakes at every wind,

In fields that wave and rustle all day long,
    The new-bound sheaves she gathered as they fell.
The sun above their head was high and strong,
    It shone from out a sky of asphodel,
And floods of molten ore it poured amain,
Scorching and blasting all the laboring plain.

The bending reapers never cease their toil,
    Panting for breath, and uttering not a word;
But still the long scythe gathers in its spoil
    With rhythmic stroke, whose swishing sound is heard,
All through the drowsy upland, like the roll
Of breakers 'gainst some jutting rocky knoll.

But she, in scarlet skirt and open throat,
    Her full chemise scarce closed upon her breast,
By a loose kerchief, hardly seemed to note
    Those-sun beats, which the very grass oppressed,
And forced the summer flowers to droop and fold
Their petals, as they sank upon the mold.

She bore, as if against that sun-beat steeled,
    Advancing with light step, a sheaf of wheat,
Or truss of hay new-gathered from the field;
    And when they saw her walk with tripping feet,
The men looked up, and felt within them move
That tremor of the heart that heralds love.

They seemed to scent afar, that sultry hour,
The fragrance of her balmy breath, that sweet,
Thrilling perfume of love as of a flower;
Then as the evening saw their task complete,
And the red star declined in heaven and stood
Ready to plunge at last into the flood,

There, suddenly, against the evening's rose,
On the plain's edge are seen the forms, that stand
Gigantic, of two reapers ranged as foes,
They meet in deadly combat, hand to hand;
Distinct they showed from off that crimson field,
And sunset flashes on the scythes they wield.

The shadows now enshroud, as in a tomb,
The peaceful countryside, and like a sweat
Break out the drops of dew, in the cold gloom,
On stubble and shorn meadow; and the last jet
Of sunlight fades, and with one glittering speck
The glories of a star the orient deck.

The last sounds, faint and distant, die away;
The yapping of a dog at some locked door;
The sheep bells tinkle, in the distance gray
Of the long road that seams the heathery moor;
The earth low rustles as it sinks to rest;
The stars come out upon heaven's dusky breast.

The way she took buried itself in shades
Of woodland, and with tripping step she sped,
Enjoying in those tortuous arcades
The balmy odors that the foliage shed.

And oft she stopped to gaze in wonder through
The tangled boughs that roofed the avenue,

As twinkling star and constellation spread
Like pearls upon the gleaming firmament,
It seemed that something floated o'er her head,
Gracious, and breathing to her heart content
A sapphire silence, that had power to bless;
As if the night came down with a caress,

And on her spirit poured a languorous spell
Subtle and soft; and yet that tepid gloom,
In which her sense seemed swooning, did compel,
Her spirit in its reverie, to give room
To vague misgivings, founded on distress,
A feeling of her utter loneliness.

The furtive pattering of unseen feet,
The timid bounds of creatures of the night,
That o'er the woodland's mossy carpet fleet,
With eye unquiet and with footsteps light;
Within the wood faint sounds and rustlings rouse,
And viewless birds dash down on creaking boughs.

She sat her down, feeling a numbness creep
From her heel upward till it reached her thigh;
And then an impulse seized her, strong and deep,
All her encumbering garments to lay by;
And lie on scented herbs, awaiting there,
The magic kiss that floated in the air.

And oft a shuddering tremor shook her frame;
And oft a feverish flush upon her skin
Sent to her marrow a consuming flame;
The glowworms round like points of fire, within
That leafy covert hovering, seemed to bring
The stars of heaven to give her welcoming.

But suddenly, upon her she felt slip
A ponderous living body, and there fell
From one whose mouth was fever, on her lip
A shower of kisses; in that quiet dell
Soft as a bed of slumber, she was pressed
By two strong arms, close to a lover's breast.

But he in turn upon the grassy glade,
Quick as an ox beneath the ax's blow,
Full length and senseless suddenly was laid,
Stretched at the mercy of a furious foe;
His rival clutched his throat, and groaning he
Lay flat and helpless 'neath the conqueror's knee.

But he, the victor, is himself o'erthrown.
A furious fist, planted between his eyes,
Lays him upon the greensward, pale and prone;
And, through the dense and tangled coppice, rise
Echoes of many footsteps on the way,
In haste and fury to the field of fray.

Then, in the gloomy shadows of the grove,
The dimlit battle recommenced its rage,—
A fight of men delirious with love;
Fiercer than stags, that with crossed antlers wage

Wild warfare for the timid dappled doe
That waits to follow with the conquering foe.

And there were screams ot rage, and groans of pain,
And crack of ribs beneath the fierce embrace
Of iron sinews; and swift blows that rain,
Hard as a hammer, on the foeman's face;
While on the battle she gazed placidly,
Throned on the trunk of an uprooted tree.

She watched the tide of battle ebb and flow,
And pride and joy were gleaming in her eye;
Pride, that it was at last her bliss to know
How loved she was; and joy that she was by
To see the fierce encounter, and attend
The thrilling arbitration of its end.

And when at last a solitary man
Stood on that field, victorious over all,
Blood-stained and dizzy tho' he was, she ran
To meet him, and before his feet to fall;
And, as beneath a tufted tree they sate,
Received the wild beast's tribute to his mate.

III.

In every sudden village conflagration,
The sparks shoot forth, as from a threshing-floor
The chaff is scattered, and the desolation
Is very quickly spread from door to door,
From roof to roof, till, running far and wide,
The flames extend o'er all the countryside.

Each house, in fact, a sort of torch becomes,
A huge and smoking torch, that sets alight
The thatch and wooden wall of neighboring homes;
And, like a raging monster of the night,
It seizes every homestead it sets eyes on,
'Till finally it reaches the horizon.

And thus it is with love's consuming flame,
Which ravages the heart of all it kindles;
Love can the body's vigor scorch and tame,
For like a fire its fury never dwindles:
From man to man spreads on the mad desire,
'Till the whole neighborhood is wrapped in fire.

Through woodland paths, embowered in shadowy green,
Through dingles deep, her reckless instinct drove her
At nightfall through those paths where might be seen,
Most probably, the coming of a lover.
When more than one man felt the passion cruel,
The matter was decided by a duel.

Then to the conqueror she made surrender,
As if this life of sense was her vocation,
Without one feeling, tedious or tender,
By night and day receiving the ovation
Of kissing lovers, without love or hate,
Accepting everything as merely fate.

And all who scanned her well from top to toe,
And saw her marvelous body's hidden graces,
And plucked the fruit whose seeds the Sisters sow
On some immortal favorite's flanks and faces,

Were secretly with feverish tremor fired—
A sense of something dreaded or desired.

They shivered, as beneath a frosty blast;
And yet it was the tremor of a fever;
They looked regretfully upon the past,
Yet eagerly they sought, and could not leave her;
And with wild words, whene'er she was away,
Followed her flying footsteps night and day.

IV.

The very beasts the sight of her affected
With many signs of interest and emotion;
And she caressed them all, and ne'er neglected
To pat and call them; for she had a notion,
That round her path the creatures seemed to hover,
With all the gestures of a human lover.

On furred and woolly coats her hand she laid,
These dumb admirers tenderly to greet;
For her far off the very stallions neighed;
The dogs came after her and licked her feet;
The bulls stood prancing as if they had seen
A heifer come to meet them on the green.

And then the barnyard cocks, as if the call
Of amorous combat sounded in the air,
Flapped loud their pinions; and with antlers tall
The stags prepared for fight when she was near,
And, on their faun-like, tapering limbs, drew back,
And front to front, made ready for attack.

The wasps buzzed round her, yet they never stung;
The yellow bees walked o'er her skin, nor set
A single prick there; birds high circling sung,
As she went by, their sweetest chansonnette,
Brushed her with fondling wing, upon their way,
Or fed their young that in her bosom lay.

She filled with love the flocks upon the road,—
The solemn rams, with crooked horn, who slighted
The shepherd's shrilly call, that trembling flowed;
And the sheep bleated low, when she was sighted;
And in a mincing amble at her side,
Kept up with her alert and vigorous stride.

V.

On certain evenings, when the sky was fair
She'd steal away and seek in secrecy,
To bathe her limbs, beneath the balmy air,
In the cool briny waters of the sea;
When on the rising tide and sandy dune,
Was poured the pallid radiance of the moon.

And she would hurry quickly to the shore
And o'er the yellow sands, that stretched in view
To boundless distance, she would flee, before
The shadow that seemed bounding to pursue
Her footsteps; though that shadow was her own;
No living thing was there, but she alone.

Her garments on the sandy shore she set,
And naked, like a goddess, she descended,
And in the wave her snowy ankle wet,
The wave whose back was pearl and emerald blended;
Then, stretching out her arms with sudden leap,
She plunged into the bosom of the deep.

When from that ocean bath she came to land,
Her heart was happy, and her body dripping;
She stretched herself full length upon the sand,
Into the depths of that soft mantle slipping,
'Till the strong, splendid body found a rest,
In something that inclosed it like a nest.

And when her steps turned homeward, soft and slow,
Incrusted by the fleck of ocean brine,
Her glorious form with new life seemed to glow,
One might have said a statue, tall and fine,
Of lustrous bronze had issued from the roar
Of breakers, flung by tempest to the shore.

And on the mold of beauty which her form
Had left imprinted on that sandy pillow,
The heavens looked down, with million eyes of warm
And loving wonder; and the stealing billow
Reached it at last, and, with effacing hand,
Leveled once more the sad and sullen strand.

VI.

She was the Spirit of Life, one time created
Under primeval law, who shows her face
On earth, from time to time reincarnated,
Eternal type of our poor human race;
Whose beauty reigns, the queen of mundane things,
Who by her dazzling power in fetters flings

The human will: Art is her sacred child.
And She is the beloved of all, as all
Loved Cleopatra with a passion wild
And Phryne, they love her, and she lets fall
Her tenderness on all, like balmy dew
Descending softly from heaven's arch of blue.

No living thing she hated; with a smile
The very humblest she would try to please.
There was a shepherd, in whose acts of guile
The fiercest wolves became accomplices;
A wrinkled man,—begotten of a witch
Who threw her naked offspring in a ditch.

A shepherd of the place picked up the brat,
And raised him, leaving him as legacy
The furious hatred of a cornered rat
'Gainst all in wealth and in prosperity.
Moreover he inherited, 'tis said,
A pack of magic secrets, dark and dread.

The sireless child to lonely boyhood grew;
He led to random pasture goats and geese;
Stood on the coppice side the whole day through;
And, with no hope of shelter or release,
Endured the pelting rain and bitter blast,
Or, worse, the insults on his lineage cast.

Then, when the labor of the day was done,
Wrapped in his cloak upon the cottage floor,
He sought for slumber; yet he never won
Repose, till he had thought of those who snore
On curtained beds of down, and then, out-worn,
He slept until the sky was lit by dawn.

The horizon kindled with a streak of day,
And his black bread he took upon the plain,
While watching o'er the distant cottage play
The rising thread of smoke with famine's pain;
It told him of what most he did desire,
The fragrant soup, that bubbled on the fire.

And he grew old; and round his dwelling dim
And wretched, rose an atmosphere of dread,
In the long distant vales men spoke of him;
Tattling of what he did and what he said
In talks of him full many a cheek turned pale,
And women watched till morn to hear the tale.

They said he could control men's destiny,
Giving them, as he chose, good luck or bad;
Call down disaster on an enemy,
And turn to dust and ashes all he had.

Could read the stars, and in the heavens could spell
The words of fire that all the future tell.

A vagabond, he kept from day to day
His hovel habitation: from the crowd
Around him ever skulking far away.
Yet often cries were heard that strange and loud
He uttered on the wind, and to his cry
Wild voices, not of this world, made reply.

It was believed his eyes could fascinate;
That sinister and evil power they cast;
That they the wildest bull could subjugate;
Then darker rumors thro' the country passed.
A girl that met him once, in falling night,
Was strangely shocked and influenced by the sight.

He did not speak a word to her, and still
Next midnight she awoke, her mind oppressed
With panic; for she felt another's will
Call her afar to lie upon his breast;
She struggled with this influence, but at length
His silent passion overcame her strength.

Although it was pitch dark, and the lone night
Impressed her spirit with alarm and awe,
From her own home she secretly took flight
To share his wretched hovel and his straw.
'Tis said, that other girls shared this one's fate,
To glut the monster's lust insatiate.

That all of them, and they were young and fair,
Without one tremor of disgust or shame,
Exposed to him their virgin bosoms bare;
And suffered from him what we may not name.
They really seemed in love, and smiled as smugly,
As if he had not been both old and ugly.

His face was hairy from his shaggy brow
Down to the matted covering of his chin;
His eyebrows like the bristles of a sow
Stuck out; his cheeks were rougher than the skin
That girt his loins; and such his brawny throat.
In fact in face he was a very goat.

And when upon the lofty mountain crest
Where shone the sun, though on the plains below
The darkling shadows of the evening rest,
They saw this evil-faced old shepherd go,
And the loud clank of his clubfoot was heard,
You might have thought the devil had appeared.

This aged Satan of the country, filled
With shameless passions, once upon a time
Met her whom all the people round had willed
Should be their adoration; 'twas the time
Of April, and the gorse had spread around
Her golden flowers upon the barren ground

Of a gray, grassless foothill of the plain.
The sight of her to this lascivious loon
Was like a sunstroke; and he strove in vain
To check the trembling fire, that made him swoon.

Then gathering all his life into one stare,
He fed upon that face surpassing fair.

Their glances, crossed like rapiers in a fight.
It was the meeting of Divinities,
Hostile, one god of darkness, one of light,
A sudden meeting under earthly skies.
He starts like one with leveled piece, whose eyes
Expect a deer and see a panther rise.

She passes on,—the bloom of her blond hair,
As o'er the slope she glides that April day,
Is blended with that gold of blossoms rare,
That flutter in the gorse upon her way.
And yet the clustering ringlets that bedight her
Are paler than the flower, tho' somewhat brighter.

And now she trembled, for she oft had learned
His hideous and impious renown;
And tho' her fear was half to loathing turned,
In wonderment she wandered up and down;
Until the labors of the day had past;
And night with its companions came at last.

She was alone, and saw for the first time
With dread, the deepening shadows that descended
In fields and woodlands; but the measured chime
Of bells that with the song of reapers blended,
As her path entered a dark avenue,
Filled her loud-beating heart with courage new.

The oaks were thickly ranged on either side
Of that broad grassy avenue, and there
She seemed to see, with stature magnified,
The hideous shepherd with his shaggy hair,
Standing erect beneath a spreading oak,
And yet he neither made a sign nor spoke.

Yet as she hurried by, in frantic flight,
She knew not whether that from which she shrunk
So madly, in the dimness of the night
Had not been merely some dismantled trunk,
That raised its withered arms, as if in wrath,
Standing midway across the forest path.

And days and months went by; and now her mind
And reason, like the bird that loses breath
As with lead-burdened wing he fights the wind,
Are overwrought and troubled to the death,
And sink beneath the weight of ceaseless fear;
The deadly presage of some ill so near.

She dare not even step beyond the door;
For soon as she appears upon the plain,
She's sure to see that wretch start up before
Her footsteps, at the turning of the lane;
His crafty eye that seems to say, "To-morrow,"
Is like hot iron upon her ceaseless sorrow

This heavy burden bends her will at last;
And in her heart, which panic fears benumb,
She feels fatality her lot has cast;
Her destiny compels her to succumb,

She goes to tell the Master her surrender
Thinking it is the Powers above that send her.

It was a night of winter, and the snow,
  By which the earth was mantled wide and deep,
Revealed her stilly whiteness high and low
  In hill and dale; the breezes gently creep
In weariness, as if from the world's end
They came, and frozen could no further wend.

The forest creaked beneath that glacial gust,
  Where the tall, naked trees stand rigidly
Their gray trunks powdered by the icy dust;
  The moon is shining in the gloomy sky;
Her profile but a single line of light.
The very stones are pinched by winter's might.

Thus she advanced, altho' her feet with frost
  Are bitten, and she moved without a care;
Sure that the journey's labor is not lost.
  Once ended, she will find her shepherd there;
Like a black patch along the lonely route
She hurries. She stands terror-struck and mute.

Her feet are rooted to the spot, for lo!
  Across the waste she sees two powerful hounds
Running and gamboling along the snow.
  The shadows of their limbs in mighty bounds
Outstretched, seemed swollen to gigantic size,
And a wild glare of joy is in their eyes.

She recognized them as the shepherd's pair
Of watchdogs. Breathless, shrunken in their flanks
By hunger, with soft eyes, beneath long hair
Half hidden, they came on, as giving thanks
For the kind welcome visit she was paying.
Then she had no more terror of their baying.

Before her they both bounded, with sharp cries
Of joy, as at a royal festival,
Bristling with fangs that glistened laughterwise.
Like two great princes in some noble hall
Seeking the Princess Beautiful to bring
Into the presence of their lord the king,

And there conducting her, as round her steed,
They prance and caracole, with stately glee,
So did these guides of love this Woman lead.
The Man was waiting for her step, and he
Who upright stood before a water butt,
Came, seized her arm, and pointed to his hut.

The door of the vile hovel open stood
And in he pushed her, while his rude emprise
Divested her of everything that could
Hide her pure beauty from his ardent eyes.
He did not try his rapture to dissemble,
From head to foot the wretch was all a-tremble.

He acted as a man who feels the shock
Of long anticipation safely ended;
As one who turns the key and opes the lock,
Which has so far the aimed-at prize defended;

Panting he stands, like beagles, who pursue
But have not caught the quarry full in view.

And when she felt him pressing on her skin
The slimy kiss that chilled her like a snail,
Perceiving the flocks' odor lingered in
His garments, like the rank and pungent trail
Of vermin, then she shuddered, and was mute,
Under the frosty thrill of the salute.

But while he held her fast, the thought came o'er him,
Viewing her tender flanks, her features fine,
That many haughty striplings had, before him,
Embraced and kissed that effigy divine;
That he had claimed and summoned to his call
One who was made to be beloved of all—

The heart of the old cripple felt arise
Within it pangs of jealousy, so keen
As would admit no pause or compromise;
A mixture of satiety and spleen
Prompted in him a longing, vague as cruel,
To take dire vengeance on this precious jewel!

First she submitted to her shaggy wooer;
Then, soon as she resisted, he was wild;
And with raised fist he threatened to undo her.
The silent snow, in massive drifts up-piled,
Deadened the cries, the groans, the shrieks of pain,
Which told that somebody was being slain.

But suddenly the dogs, that watched outside,
The lady's guardians, of their office proud,—
Uttered a dismal howl, which echoed wide
Along the level desert, long and loud,
And as it died away into a whine,
Cold shocks of horror shivered down their spine.

Then, in that hut a bitter war was waged—
Thuds of a body 'gainst the wainscot flung,—
A combat within narrow walls engaged—
Sobs from a weak and weeping woman wrung,—
A pause, and then a storm of rage and rattle—
Goes on persistently the furious battle,

And only ceases, after one faint cry
For help has died unechoed on the waste.
And then the day falls feebly from a sky
Of ashen pallor, and the breezes haste,
Whining and moaning in the bitter cold;
And glassy frosts the coppice-trees enfold

Till they look dead; and death in everything
Shows everything is verging to the end.
But like as if a curtain rose, the spring
Of day is opened, on the snow to send
Fresh rosy radiance in a rushing flood;
And all the purple welkin turns to blood.

And blood-red blazes all the mountain side,
That rises at the limit of the plains;
Blood-red the shepherd's hovel, and the tide
Of sunlight now the icy branches stains

Blood-red; as if one blot of murder lies on
The landscape from horizon to horizon.

And when the shepherd on his threshold stands,
  Blood-red in his apparel he appears;
And redder than the dawn his shaggy hands;
  But when the crimson of the orient clears
And all is white once more, beneath the ray
Of cloudless sunset in a cloudless day,

He standing at this open cabin door,
  Haggard and pale with last night's festival,
Is redder and more blood stained than before.
  He seems as if, ere he had issued, all,
Face, hands, and bosom, he, with fury blind,
Had in one bloody bath incarnadined.

Stooping to grasp some snow, he leaves a trace
  Of blood upon the surface; then he kneels
And tries to wash the crimson from his face;
  Trembling he sees the ruddy flood that steals
From the hot contact; and with pangs of fright
He turns and takes his course in headlong flight.

Descending from the mountain side, he flies
  Along the hollows, and in thickets dense
Like manes that on the ridgy uplands rise;
  As a lone wolf the hunter's cries insense,
He doubles, then he halts with fearful mind,
To see the hamlet has been left behind.

Then in the hollow of his hand he sheds
Some water, with a wish to wash away
The scarlet patches which he so much dreads;
Then he sets out upon his homeward way;
He thinks with terror of his wandering
Even to death, not seeing anything

Or anyone he knows, thro' snowy wastes
Beneath a sky as blank as it is cold.
He listens, hears a bell, and then he hastes
To his own native village and his fold.
He finds the villagers from gate to gate
Are talking mournful and disconsolate,

And as they run, they cry—"Come, all of you,
For she, the one we loved so well, is dead."
He passes by, and vanishes from view,
And at some scattered houses shows his head,
And cries, "Come on, and join the funeral train;
My knife the lady of our love has slain."

And then the rumor spreads, and forth it flies
From village on to village, and they all
Right quickly from their various labors rise,
And follow at the halting shepherd's call.
None tries his headlong purpose to restrain,
And like a dusky ribbon o'er the plain

A flock of peasants follow in his wake.
And every burgh they traverse swells the mass.
Tumultuous toward the height their way they take
To which the breathless shepherd they see pass

To guide them, but they all of them know well
What woman has been murdered in his cell.

They ask not why, or how he did the deed;
  They vaguely see, hovering above the dead
Winged Destiny, and "She had Beauty's meed,"
  They cry aloud, "while he had Craft instead—"
One of these deities must need give way,
Two equal Powers cannot one sceptre sway,

Two rivals cannot share a single sphere,
  The god of ugliness never forgives
The god of beauty. Now the crowd draws near
  To the vile cabin, where the shepherd lives,
And pause upon the summit of the hill,
And watch their halting guide advancing still,

Till all alone he passes to the scene
  Of bloody crime. There, raising from the floor
The body that had once so cherished been,
  He flings it naked through the open door;
As if he said, in scorn, as he forswore it—
"There keep this effigy, for I restore it."

Then to his noisome cabin he retreats
  And bolts the door and all are quite content
To leave him tortured still by amorous heats,
  And trembling still with rage inconsequent.
Meanwhile the dazzling body by the door
Is lying, utterly unstained by gore.

For finding her reclining motionless
The dogs had tenderly licked off the stain;
She still seemed living and asleep, distress
And all the lingering agony of pain
In dying, could not mar the immortal grace
Whose radiance still lit up her placid face.

The knife stood upright at the very place
Where part the milk-white billows of her breast.
Her figure did a golden outline trace
Upon the snow-white ground, and all expressed
Pity for one so fatally mismated,
And deemed her now an image consecrated.

Her flaming hair was ranged as in a ring,
And glistened like the tail of some great comet,
Or like a sun, a radiant stellar king
Of heaven, who by chance had fallen from it.
One well might call those locks of golden red
The nimbus circling a celestial head.

Some peasants, men of age and modesty,
Strip from their back the goatskin rough and gray,
And cover quick her radiant nudity.
The young with haste cut branches down, and lay
Her body on them, and with little cheer
A score of trembling arms take up the bier.

The crowd, with silent tongue and measured pace,
Accompanied the solemn funeral train
Even to the distant limits of the place;
And like a snake across the snowy plain,

The vast procession wood and mountain skirted,
Then once again the scene became deserted.

But, closely bolted in his hovel dim,
    The shepherd felt his solitude unpleasant.
The universe had all deserted him;
    He heard no voice of either priest or peasant;
And when he went into the open air,
Naught but a frozen landscape met him there.

But fearing thus in loneliness to bide
    He whistled to his dogs, his faithful friends.
And as they do not come, he opens wide
    His eyes in wonder, and his glance he bends
In all directions, but it does not meet
That brace of watchdogs bounding at his feet.

He shouts to them, his voice is strong; and yet,
    The snow is a great deadener of sound;
His maniac ululations still are met
    By no kind bark; at last the dogs are found
Following the course the long procession led;
They leave their master to attend the dead.

TO A CHILD

WHY dost thou weep, my child? for hast thou found
So soon the thorns that hem life's pathway round?
Run, weave thee garlands of the summer flowers!
Tears ill become thy fresh and tender hours.
All has its season, thine is meant for song;
'Tis thine to sing, my sweet, the summer long.
Run, with light step across the thickets leap,
For all the world seems sad, when children weep,
And all creation happy when they smile again.
Like bursts of sunlight after summer rain,
Smiles on the lips of childhood e'er should play,
And birds beside their cradles pour their lay,
For God bends listening, 'mid the choiring throng,
To children's laughter and the wild bird's song.

ON THE DEATH OF LOUIS BOUILHET

DEAD is my master, dead; oh, why should fate
Have smitten one so kind, so good, so great?
Thus, Lord, thou choosest by thy side to place,
Bereaving us, the loftiest of our race.
Feeble our generation, so we die,
In vain to heaven the sad survivors cry.
Does heaven rejoice when we our best resign?
Why didst thou make them mortal, Power divine?
Can their death add to glory such as Thine?
Dead is he? What is death? There naught we see
Remaining, but a lifeless effigy.
Naught of the man; not e'en the kindly smile,
Which won the hearts it never could beguile;
That seemed to whisper with a look benign,
"Thou art my friend; I love thee, friend of mine."
That intellectual eye, kind, open, clear,—
O what a doom, within the grave to bear
Obstruction's fixity, buried beneath
The boundless, unplumbed mystery of death.

Yet since from dust of earth the buried corn
Starts forth again and in new life is born,
Since naught can perish in creation's range,
Since all is but development and change,
We know that he who left us yesterday,
Has but laid down his earthly cloak of clay;
But whither has his spirit sped away?
Has it left us to join the company
Of the great brother-dead who looked for it on high?
What unknown world before its vision lies,
This soul, that was a poet, one whose eyes
Were wide with wonder and with love's surprise.
Oft from those eyes a glance of splendor came
As potent and as dazzling as a flame.
Now those fixed orbs our inmost soul affright,
They seem amazed as if they knew to sight
Returned, alert, the soul that once had lent them light!
Ah, had you seen his orchard blooming gay,
And heard him chat with me the hours away;
How the old poet bared his heart to me
In talk—then buried in deep reverie
Would leave me, for the man was nature's child.
Ah, poor Bouilhet! he dead? the good? the mild
In spirit?—for indeed he seemed to me,
A new Messiah who had brought the key
To that high heaven where slumbers poesy.
And now behold him dead, gone is his soul
To that eternal world which is the goal
Of genius, yet his spirit from on high
Doubtless still sees us, and can hear the cry
Of one whose heartlove for the dead can never die!

SOUVENANCE

WHEN Phœbus on his car is mounting high,
And the quenched moonlight fades aneath the sky;
To nature would I fitting homage pay,
I pierce the thickets in their green array;
Wander in woodland maze or track the rill,
Pluck violets and list, while linnets trill.
At such an hour the God his dwelling left,
And fled from Thetis, of a love bereft.
Then dawns the day, scatter the clouds of sleep,
In joy the worshipers from couches leap,
Toilers start forth to work in courage high,
With one consent their daily task to ply.
By the slow thread-like stream my way I took,
The heavens' blue calm was mirrored in the brook.
Sometimes thro' flowery dells the waters wound,
And cut with many a turn the teeming ground,
Sometimes a rocky barrier crossed the dell,
Till in white cascade the pent-up waters fell.

A TALE OF OLD TIMES

Produced for the first time at the Théâtre-Français, Paris,
February 19, 1879.

TO MADAME CAROLINE COMMANVILLE

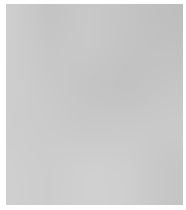
MADAME:

At a time when you alone knew of it, I offered you this little play, which should be styled more properly a dialogue. Now that it has been acted in public and applauded by some friends of mine, permit me to dedicate it to you.

It is my earliest dramatic work. In every way it belongs to you; for you, after being the companion of my childhood, have become to me a charming and an earnest friend; and, as if to draw closer the ties already existing between us, the affection which we both have for my dearest uncle has made us so to speak members of the same family. Accept then, Madame, the tribute of these lines as a testimony of the devoted, respectful, and fraternal affection of your sincere friend and old companion.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

Paris, Feb. 23, 1879.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE COUNT

THE MARCHIONESS

A TALE OF OLD TIMES

A Louis XV. room. A blazing fire on the hearth. The time, winter. The old Marchioness in an armchair, a book on her knees; in low spirits.

A SERVANT [*announcing a visitor*]

My lord the Count.

THE MARCHIONESS

And so, dear Count, at last
You've come to me; I see that your old friends
Are unforgotten; thanks for this kind visit;
I waited for you with anxiety.
The sight of you each day has grown to me
Habitual, and now, I know not why,
This evening I feel a little gloomy.
Draw near the fire and let us sit awhile
And talk.

THE COUNT [*sits down, after kissing her hand*]

And I, dear Marchioness, myself
Am melancholy; for our sense of age

Crushes the spirit; 'tis the young alone
Carry a store of gladness in the heart,
And in their sky the clouds are quickly passed.
They have so many objects in their life,
Their love, so many objects in pursuit!
But we, our life is lacking in this gladness,
Our melancholy kills us, for it clings
Like moss upon a sapless tree, and thus,
You see, 'tis ours to struggle and beat off
This terrible affliction; and but lately
D'Armont arrived, to take me by surprise;
We stirred the ashes of the ancient days;
Spoke of old friends and of our ancient loves!
And since that hour, like an uncertain shadow
I see my distant youth revive again;
Thus I am come wounded and gloomy here
To sit by you and talk about the past.

THE MARCHIONESS

Since morning, I have suffered the blockade
Of the cold weather; to the roaring wind
I listen, and I watch the snowflakes fall.
For winter is affliction at our age,
And brings us suffering; when it freezes hard
We feel as if we were about to die.
Yes, let us talk, for to remember days
Of vanished youth revives again one instant
Our cold and frozen age. I see at last
The sun is bright.

THE COUNT

Yes, for a winter day.
My sun is dim, my sky is cloudy still.

THE MARCHIONESS

Come, tell me some adventure of your own.
You were, they say, skilled in the rapier once;
You were, dear Count, a bully and a rake,
Rich, a fine gentleman, and proud withal.
You've figured in a scandal and crossed blades
With many a husband; for I have been told
By a fine lady, when we talked together
One evening, tho' beneath her breath she spoke,
That once your step made many hearts beat faster.
Unless they lied to me, you were a page,
A haunter of the street, a rollicker;
Four months, they say, you slept in durance vile,
All for a villager who hanged himself;
He had, they say, a young and pretty wife.
The dull wife of a villager! Oh, Count!
What folly to endure for such as her
Four months' imprisonment. If it had been
Some lady of high rank, and beauty rare,
It had been reasonable; not for her.
Come, find for me some tale of gallantry,
And make the heroine a noble dame,—
Romantic love,—the classic closet, where
The husband suddenly returning home
Catches the lover lying in concealment
Hidden by his old clothes!

THE COUNT

Why do you harp
Upon this high-born lady? Others too
Can please as well as she, for womankind
Is made to charm us, be she noble born,

Or humble; for true beauty has no title,
And graciousness requires no pedigree.

THE MARCHIONESS

Thanks!—But I do not wish to learn about
Your common loves, for there is something else
In the recesses of your history—
Dear Count, I'm listening, please begin the tale.

THE COUNT

I must obey you, since it is your will.
Ah, certainly, that proverb tells the truth—
"The will of woman is the will of God."
When first I came to court I was romantic;
But soon my eyes were opened; I was shocked
At my awakening, for I was in love.
I loved the peerless Countess de Paulé;
I thought that she was faithful to my love.
One day, I caught her in another's arms.
My heart was broken, Marchioness, that night;
And two long months I spent in senseless tears;
But all the court and city laughed at me;
For all that breed is envious and base;
They hiss at the unfortunate and praise
Those who succeed. I was deceived and failed.
And yet, soon after that, I found myself
A second mistress, yet another shared
The girl's affection; 'twas a poet, one
Who turned off verses, called her "flower" and "star,"
"Light of the universe," I know not what.
And when I sent a challenge to the fool,
"He was a man of intellect" he said,
"And stuck to his own trade." Too great a coward

To draw the sword, he undertook to write
A senseless sonnet, and again the laugh
Was raised against me; I was dubbed an ass.
This lesson put an end to all my doubts;
I ceased to look to one, and I became
A universal lover and I took
For my device an ancient apothegm—
"All faith is folly"—and I found it true.

THE MARCHIONESS

And yet at other times when you declared
Your love, and at the feet of some fair dame
Uttered your sighs, and wrapped her round with love,
Did you speak thus?

THE COUNT

I did not, but confess,
Between ourselves, that every woman acts
Like a spoiled child; they flatter her too much,
And sing her praises in too high a key.
Her titled flatterers and these sonnet mongers,
That pour out every day like water taps
Fine compliments and sugared poetry,
Have rendered her a child, spoiled and puffed up
With vanity. But she at least can love?
Not she: what she desires to have is not
The love of opening manhood, whose sole fault
Is purity, which to that age belongs,
But the wild passion of some debauchee.
He, as he goes, is gazed upon by all
With wonder, sometimes almost with respect.
The women at his look are roused to feeling,
And tremble, simply since they know this man

Has the one merit, exquisite and rare,
Of being first in the seducer's art
Among the men of France and of Navarre.
'Tis not that he is young or beautiful,
Or has great qualities—these things are naught.
This man delights them merely from the fact
That he is reprobate. How strange it is!
And it is thus this angel is seduced!
But if perchance another comes to ask,
That she will only cast a glance on him;
She laughs him in the face and scoffs at him,
Cries for the moon! And you are well aware
I speak not of one instance but of many.

THE MARCHIONESS

You are quite polite this evening. Thanks again!
Now listen to a tale that I shall tell;
Old Master Fox, now paralytic grown,
But still a mighty hunter of fresh meat,
With empty belly, once was prowling round;
And as he went, he thought of bygone feasts—
Such as the chicken that he caught one night
Just at the corner of a neighboring wood;
The doubling hare he captured at full speed.
Old age had put these dainties out of reach.
He was less nimble, and must fast more often.
And once upon the wind the scent of game
Struck on his nostrils, and a sudden light
Flashed in the pupil of his aged eye.
And he perceived upon an ancient wall,
Perched with their heads beneath their wings, a row
Of pullets; but our Fox was heavy limbed;
The road to reach them was too difficult,

In spite of longing, hunger, and hard fast.
"They are," he said, "too green for such as I,
And better suited to a younger man."

THE COUNT

Dear Marchioness, you are venomous to-night!
But I will cite some other instances.
There's Samson and Delilah, Antony
And Cleopatra; then there's Hercules,
And Omphale before whose feet he lay.

THE MARCHIONESS

Your theory of love lacks cheerfulness.

THE COUNT

Not so, I think man's like a fruit, which God
Has cut in two. Through the wide world he walks,
And he is never happy till he find,
Amid the uncertain fortune that he meets,
His other half and chance is his sole guide.
Now chance is blind yet is his sole reliance;
And scarcely ever is his search successful.
Yet, when he meets his object, straight he loves her.
You, I believe, were that half of myself,
Which God had destined for me, that I had sought
But which I never found, and never loved.
But here to-day, our journey at an end,
Chance has too late our aged lots united.

THE MARCHIONESS

Well, that is better; but you have gone wrong,
And I shan't let you off so easily;
Now can you tell me, Count, to what I would
Compare you? As a miser keeps his house,

You keep your house locked up; you are the host.
When visitors arrive, you think them robbers,
You show the people naught but worn-out things.
No more evasions! For a little while
Be serious, for a miser in some hole
Keeps hidden a coffer filled with purest gold.
The poorest heart some secret treasure hides.
What have you at the bottom of your heart?
A portrait of a girl about sixteen,
Some light romance you think of with a blush,
And keep as secret. Have I guessed the truth?
Sometimes you take a fancy, later on,
To come and look upon these images,
Abandoned long ago and left behind,
Those past experiences, which give us pain
Altho' we love to feel the pain they give.
Some evening, you will lock your door, and spend
Hours in perusing this old book, that tells
The tales of one old heart. You gaze again
Upon the flower she gave you one fine night,
The flower that keeps the scent of vanished springs.
You listen, how you listen, till you hear
Her voice brought back by those old memories.
You kiss the flower, whose outline has been stamped,
As on the page in which it has been pressed,
So on your heart. Alas! when suffering comes
With age, you try to consecrate in days
Declining, the sweet scent of ancient flowers
And early years.

THE COUNT

'Tis true, but even while
I feel in my heart's core revive again

My oldest memory, I feel quite prepared,
Dear Marchioness, to tell you all about it.
But I demand of you an equal frankness.
'Tis turn about with me and whim for whim;
Story for story. Now you must begin.

THE MARCHIONESS

I'll gladly do so, tho' my tale must be
Mere trifling; but I know not how it is
The things of our young life, like wine, take force
And sweeten in their aging and from year
To year they grow in their importance.
You know a hundred of these little tales;
The first romance of all young girls is there;
And every woman in her memory
Counts two or three of them; I had but one.
And this is why I think it keeps a place
So fresh, so firmly rooted in my heart,
And makes so large a portion of my life.
I then was very young,—I was eighteen;
And I had learned to read the old romances,
And I had often dreamed in the old paths
Of the old park, watching the rising moon,
And 'neath the willows listening to hear,
Whether the breezes spoke not to the branch
Of love; and dreaming ever of that lot,
Of which the girl in secret ever thinks,
Which she expects, and for which she believes
God made her. That was the constant theme
Of all my reverie. I was young and proud
And charming, and one day he came to me—
I felt my girlish heart bounding with joy.
I fell in love with him, he found me kind—

My beautiful young man. Alas! next day
He left me, that was all—a kiss, a pressure
Of two young hands, a glance exchanged which he
Too soon forgot. Perhaps he said, "That girl,
She is a darling"; then the thing forever
Faded from out his heart; but God forbid
That a child's love should e'er be treated thus.
Ah, but you tell me you find womankind
Unfeeling and capricious. Fie! for shame!
It is your fault, for she could love you well;
But it is you that hinder her from loving:
The first love that she feels you disappoint;
Poor girl, I was a fool and credulous,
But you will call his claim ridiculous.
You mock at love—long did I wait for it,
When it did not return I took a husband.
But I confess that I preferred the other.
I bare my heart to you, now show me yours.

THE COUNT [*smiling*]

Are you then my confessor?

THE MARCHIONESS

That I am!
And I refuse to you my absolution
If you continue in this mocking mood,
You wretched and unfeeling man.

THE COUNT

Attend.
It was in Brittany during the time
Which men have named the Terror. Everywhere
Was fighting, and I fought for the Vendeans.

I served with Soufflet, and it is just here
That I begin my tale. It happened that
The Loire had to be crossed. We were delayed—
Posted in different parties, certain friends
And some old peasants. I was in command.
We were perhaps a hundred men in all
Hidden in the bushes that hemmed round the plain,
Protecting the retreat, and step by step
Receding, till at last our men ceased firing.
And all were then dispersing, as each day
Had been our custom, when a certain soldier
A Blue, whose native home was in the south,
Who, I presume, by skulking in the bushes,
Had come upon me, pulled his trigger twice
And shot me with his pistol. With one blow
I cleft his head. But in my shoulder bore
Two bullets. All my people had gone off.
Then, like a prudent general, I set spurs
To my good charger, and across the fields,
With dizzy brain and slackened rein, I fled,
Wild as a madman, and at last, confused,
Wounded and quite o'erspent and bleeding fast,
I tumbled from my horse and found myself
Upon the further side of a deep bank.
Soon after, close at hand, I saw a light,
And heard some voices. 'Twas a little cot
Which I had stumbled on, and I cried out,
"In the king's name, I bid you open!" Then
Quite spent and stiffened with the cold, I fainted,
And groaning fell across the open doorway.
How long I lay there, I can never tell,
But when my senses came again to me,
I found that I was lying in a bed

Both warm and comfortable, and kind friends,
Waiting for my awakening anxiously,
Were hurrying round, and stood about my bed,
Full of solicitude, and in the midst
Of these dull Bretons like a woodland bird
Amid a brood of turkeys, I beheld
A maiden of sixteen. Ah! Marchioness,
What a sweet face was hers, how exquisite
Her bearing, oh, how beautiful she was!
With those blond locks beneath her little cap,
So silky and so long, that any queen had given
Her wealth to claim them for her own. And then
Her feet and hands were fit for any duchess.
So much so, I had doubts about the virtue
Of her stout mother. Had I been her husband,
I would have bartered any claim I had
To be that beauty's sire, for an old song.
Good heavens! How beautiful she was! with looks
Austere and modest; and she never left
My bedside for four nights and three short days;
And all the time I saw her by my side,
Now seated and now standing; while she read
The book of her devotions, and no doubt
Read many a prayer therein, but ah! for whom?
Was it for me, poor wounded man, or maybe
For some one else? Then gliding to and fro,
About my chamber, with her quiet step,
She went and came; and then she gazed at me,
With glance as clear and brilliant as amber;
For she had eyes as yellow and as proud
As are an eagle's; and, dear Marchioness,
I greatly was surprised, when first I saw you,
To find your eyes and glance were just the same,

And seemed as if a sunbeam flashed from them.
Upon my faith! she was so fresh and fair,
That, almost without knowing it, my heart,
So great my madness, beat with love for her.
But suddenly, one morning, in my ear
The roar of cannon sounded from afar!
My host came rushing, pale and breathlessly,
Into my room. "The Blues, the Blues," he cried,
"Have overrun the plain and you must fly."
But I was still enfeebled by my wound;
And yet I rose in haste, for time was pressing.
As a horse trembles at the trumpet sound,
My brain was filled with fever for the fight.
But she, dressed all in black, as those in mourning,
Tears in her eyes, followed me to the threshold.
She held the stirrup while I mounted horse.
And, like a gallant knight, I stooped and gaily
Printed a kiss upon her forehead. She
Drew herself up, as if she felt affronted;
From her proud eye a hazel light was flashed,
And blushing, as with shame, she said to me,
"Ah, sir, I never looked for this!" She wore
An air of stateliness; I had offended
The noble maiden, awkwardly and deeply,
Doubtless the child of some old family
Of loyalists, concealed for safety's sake,
By those who had been servants of the house,
While like myself her father fought the Blues.
Ah! But I felt crest-fallen for the moment!
Yet, in those days of my Quixotic youth,
My mind was steeped in stories of romance.
So that, at once dismounting from my horse
I fell before her on my bended knee.

And said to her, "I crave your pardon, lady;
This kiss, believe me, for I never lie,
Comes from no libertine or coxcomb vain,
If you are willing, 'tis the seal to us
Of our betrothal. If the chance of war
Permit, I will return to seek again
The pledge of love which I have left with you."
"So be it," she said, smiling, "then, farewell
My promised lover." And she took my hand
And raised me, and she blew a kiss to me.
"Farewell," she said, "your pardon is secured.
Quickly return to me, my handsome stranger."
And off I rode

THE MARCHIONESS [*sadly*]

And you did ne'er return?

THE COUNT

Oh heavens! I never did; but why I did not,
I cannot tell. But was it possible
That she, the child I saw but for an instant
Could love me? And did I love her? I doubted.
I should return, I thought, perhaps too late,
To find the lovely girl wedded to some one,
Beloved and mother of a family.
Perhaps this vain proposal of a fool,
Uttered in passing, from her mind had glided,
Leaving behind a trifling memory,
A pleasant thought; and, should I find her there
Where I had left her? Was it anything
But a mistake? Had I not better keep
This far-off memory, fresh and joyous still,
And see her always as my mind had imaged;

And ne'er return, to see her once again
And meet with naught, alas, but disenchantment?
And yet that spell still lingered in my mind;
And a vague melancholy oft has filled
My heart, as if there came a fear that I
Had touched on happiness, yet had let drop
The gift, as I went traveling on my way.

THE MARCHIONESS [*with sobs in her voice*]

And might she not perhaps have loved you well,
This unknown girl? Alas! God knows she did.
But you returned no more.

THE COUNT

Dear Marchioness,
Was it so great a crime that I committed?

THE MARCHIONESS

What! did you not remark to me just now,
"I think that man is like a fruit which God
Has cut in two. Through the wide world he walks
And he is never happy till he find,
Amid the uncertain chances that he meets,
His other half and chance is his sole guide.
Now chance is blind yet is his sole reliance;
And scarcely ever is his search successful.
Yet, when he meets his object, straight he loves her.
You, I believe, were that half of myself,
Which God had destined for me, that I had sought
But which I never found, and never loved.
But here to-day, our journey at an end,
Chance has too late our aged lots united?"
Too late, alas, for you did ne'er return.

THE COUNT

You weep, dear Marchioness.

THE MARCHIONESS

Oh that is nothing.
I knew the poor girl you are talking of;
Her story made me sad, and hence my tears
But it is nothing.

THE COUNT

She to whom my troth
I plighted, Marchioness, was you yourself.

THE MARCHIONESS

Ah well, 'twas I!

[*The Count kneels before her and kisses her hand; she is much moved*]

THE MARCHIONESS

But let us think no more
About it. For it was the time of roses.
Our withered faces suit not such a theme;
And he who saw us at this moment well
Might smile at us. Come, rise, and let us end
This old romance, this memory of the past
Which fits no longer to these later years.
Yet, Count, I will return to you your pledge;
No longer young, I run no risk by it.

[*Kisses his forehead; then with a sad smile*]

But this poor kiss, I fear, has sadly aged.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

A FAMILY AFFAIR

THE Neuilly steam-tram had just passed the Porte Maillot, and was going along the broad avenue that terminates at the Seine. The small engine that was attached to the car whistled, to warn any obstacle to get out of its way, let off steam, panted like a person out of breath from running, and its pistons made a rapid noise, like iron legs running. The oppressive heat of the end of a July day lay over the whole city, and from the road, although there was not a breath of wind stirring, there arose a white, chalky, opaque, suffocating, and warm dust which stuck to the moist skin, filled the eyes, and got into the lungs. People were standing in the doors of their houses in search of a little air.

The windows of the steam-tram were down, and the curtains fluttered in the wind. There were very few passengers inside, because on such warm days people preferred the top or the platforms. The few inside consisted of stout women in strange toilettes, shopkeepers' wives from the suburbs, who made up

for the distinguished looks which they did not possess by ill-assumed dignity; of gentlemen tired of the office, with yellow faces, who stooped with one shoulder higher than the other, in consequence of long hours of work bending over the desk. Their uneasy and melancholy faces also spoke of domestic troubles, of constant want of money, of former hopes that had been finally disappointed. They all belonged to that army of poor, threadbare devils who vegetate economically in mean, plastered houses, with a tiny piece of neglected garden, in the midst of fields where night soil is deposited, on the outskirts of Paris.

A short, fat man, with a puffy face and a big stomach, dressed in black and wearing a decoration in his buttonhole, was talking to a tall, thin man, attired in a dirty, white linen suit all unbuttoned, and wearing a white Panama hat. The former spoke so slowly and hesitatingly, that occasionally it almost seemed as if he stammered; it was Monsieur Caravan, chief clerk in the Admiralty. The other, who had formerly been surgeon on board a merchant ship, had set up in practice in Courbevoie, where he applied the vague remnants of medical knowledge which he had retained after an adventurous life, to healing the wretched population of that district. His name was Chenet, and strange rumors were current as to his morality.

Monsieur Caravan had always led the normal life of a man in a government office. Every morning for the last thirty years he had invariably gone the same way to his office, had met the same men going to business at the same time and nearly on the same

spot, returned home every evening the same way, and again met the same faces, which he had seen growing old. Every morning, after buying his half-penny paper at the corner of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, he bought his two rolls, and then went into his office, like a culprit giving himself up to justice. He got to his desk as quickly as possible, always feeling uneasy, as if expecting a rebuke for some neglect of duty of which he might have been guilty.

Nothing had ever occurred to change the monotonous order of his existence; no event affected him except the work of his office, perquisites, gratuities, and promotion. He never spoke of anything but of his duties, either at the Admiralty or at home, for he had married the portionless daughter of one of his colleagues. His mind, which was in a state of atrophy from his depressing daily work, had no other thoughts, hopes, or dreams than such as related to the office, and there was a constant source of bitterness that spoiled every pleasure that he might have had, and that was the employment of so many commissioners of the navy, "tinmen," as they were called, because of their silver-lace, as first-class clerks. Every evening at dinner he discussed the matter hotly with his wife, who shared his angry feelings, and proved to their own satisfaction that it was in every way unjust to give places in Paris to men who ought properly to have been employed in the navy.

He was old now, and had scarcely noticed how his life was passing, for school had merely been exchanged, without any transition, for the office, and the ushers at whom he had formerly trembled were

replaced by his chiefs, of whom he was terribly afraid. When he had to go into the rooms of these official despots, it made him tremble from head to foot, and that constant fear had given him a very awkward manner in their presence, a humble demeanor, and a kind of nervous stammering.

He knew nothing more about Paris than a blind man could know, who was led to the same spot by his dog every day. If he read the account of any uncommon events, or of scandals, in his half-penny paper, they appeared to him like fantastic tales, which some pressman had made up out of his own head, in order to amuse the inferior employees. He did not read the political news, which his paper frequently altered, as the cause which subsidized them might require, for he was not fond of innovations, and when he went through the Avenue of the Champs-Elysées every evening, he looked at the surging crowd of pedestrians, and at the stream of carriages, like a traveler who has lost his way in a strange country.

As he had completed his thirty years of obligatory service that year, on the first of January, he had had the cross of the Legion of Honor bestowed upon him, which, in the semi-military public offices, is a recompense for the miserable slavery—the official phrase is, "loyal services"—of unfortunate convicts who are riveted to their desks. That unexpected dignity gave him a high and new idea of his own capacities, and altogether altered him. He immediately left off wearing light trousers and fancy waistcoats, and wore black trousers and long coats, on which his "ribbon," which was very broad, showed off better. He

got shaved every morning, trimmed his nails more carefully, changed his linen every two days, from a legitimate sense of what was proper, and out of respect for the national Order of which he formed a part. In fact, from that day he was another Caravan, scrupulously clean, majestic, and condescending.

At home, he said, "my cross," at every moment, and he had become so proud of it that he could not bear to see other men wearing any other ribbon in their buttonholes. He got angry when he saw strange orders, which "nobody ought to be allowed to wear in France," and he bore Chenet a particular grudge, as he met him on a tram-car every evening, wearing a decoration of some sort or another, white, blue, orange, or green.

The conversation of the two men, from the Arc de Triomphe to Neuilly, was always the same. One day they discussed, first of all, various local abuses, which disgusted them both, and the mayor of Neuilly received his full share of the blame. Then, as invariably happens in the company of a medical man, Caravan began to enlarge on the subject of illness, as, in that manner, he hoped to obtain a little gratuitous advice. His mother had been causing him no little anxiety for some time; she had frequent and prolonged fainting fits, and, although she was ninety, she would not take care of herself.

Caravan grew quite tender-hearted when he mentioned her great age, and more than once asked Doctor Chenet, emphasizing the word "doctor"—although the latter had no right to the title, being only an *Officier de Santé*, and, as such, not fully qualified—whether he had often met anyone as old as that.

And he rubbed his hands with pleasure; not, perhaps, that he cared very much about seeing the good woman last forever here on earth, but because the long duration of his mother's life was, as it were, an earnest of old age for himself. Then he continued:

"In my family, we last long, and I am sure that, unless I meet with an accident, I shall not die until I am very old."

The *medico* looked at him with pity, glancing for a moment at his neighbor's red face, his short, thick neck, his "corporation," as Chenet called it, that hung down between two flaccid, fat legs, and the apoplectic rotundity of the old, flabby official. Lifting the white Panama hat which he wore from his head, he said, with a snigger:

"I am not so sure of that, old fellow; your mother is as tough as nails, and I should say that your life is not a very good one."

This rather upset Caravan, who did not speak again until the tram put them down at their destination. The two friends got out, and Chenet asked his friend to have a glass of vermuth at the *Café du Globe*, opposite, a place which both of them were in the habit of frequenting. The proprietor, who was a friend of theirs, held out two fingers to them, which they shook across the bottles on the counter, and then they joined three of their friends, who were playing at dominoes, and had been there since midday. They exchanged cordial greetings, with the usual inquiry: "Anything fresh?" Then the three players continued their game, and held out their hands without looking up, when the others wished them "Good night" and went home to dinner.

Caravan lived in a small, two-storied house in Courbevoie, near the meeting of the roads; the ground floor was occupied by a hairdresser. Two bedrooms, a dining-room, and a kitchen formed the whole of their apartments, and Madame Caravan spent nearly her whole time in cleaning them up, while her daughter, Marie-Louise, who was twelve, and her son, Philippe-Auguste, were running about with all the little, dirty, mischievous brats of the neighborhood, and playing in the gutters.

Caravan had installed his mother, whose avarice was notorious in the neighborhood, and who was terribly thin, in the room above them. She was always in a bad temper and never passed a day without quarreling and flying into furious tempers. She used to apostrophize the neighbors standing at their own doors, the costermongers, the street-sweepers, and the street-boys, in the most violent language. The latter, to have their revenge, used to follow her at a distance when she went out and call out rude things after her.

A little servant from Normandy, who was incredibly giddy and thoughtless, performed the household work, and slept on the second floor in the same room as the old woman, for fear of anything happening to her in the night.

When Caravan got in, his wife, who suffered from a chronic passion for cleaning, was polishing up the mahogany chairs, that were scattered about the room, with a piece of flannel. She always wore cotton gloves and adorned her head with a cap, ornamented with many colored ribbons, which was always tilted on one ear, and whenever anyone caught

her polishing, sweeping, or washing, she used to say:

"I am not rich; everything is very simple in my house, but cleanliness is my luxury, and that is worth quite as much as any other."

As she was gifted with sound, obstinate, practical common sense, she swayed her husband in everything. Every evening during dinner, and afterward, when they were in bed, they talked over the business in the office, and, although she was twenty years younger, he confided everything to her, as if she had had the direction, and followed her advice in every matter.

She had never been pretty, and now had grown ugly; in addition to that, she was short and thin, while her careless and tasteless way of dressing herself hid the few, small feminine attributes which might have been brought out if she had possessed any skill in dress. Her petticoats were always awry, and she frequently scratched herself, no matter on what place, totally indifferent as to who might be there, and so persistently that anybody who saw her would have thought that she was suffering from something like the itch. The only ornaments that she allowed herself were silk ribbons, which she had in great profusion, and of various colors mixed together, in the pretentious caps which she wore at home.

As soon as she saw her husband she got up, and said, as she kissed him:

"Did you remember Potin, my dear?"

He fell into a chair, in consternation, for that was the fourth time he had forgotten a commission that he had promised to do for her.

"It is a fatality," he said; "it is no good for me to think of it all day long, for I am sure to forget it in the evening."

But as he seemed really so very sorry, she merely said, quietly:

"You will think of it to-morrow, I daresay. Anything fresh at the office?"

"Yes, a great piece of news: another tinman has been appointed senior chief clerk." She became very serious.

"So he succeeds Ramon. That was the very post that I wanted you to have. And what about Ramon?"

"He retires on his pension."

She grew furious, her cap slid down on her shoulder, and she continued:

"There is nothing more to be done in that shop now. And what is the name of the new commissioner?"

"Bonassot."

She took up the "Naval Year Book," which she always kept close at hand, and looked him up:

"'Bonassot—Toulon. Born in 1851. Student-Commissioner in 1871. Sub-Commissioner in 1875.'

Has he been to sea?" she continued, and at that question Caravan's looks cleared up, and he laughed until his sides shook.

"Just like Balin—just like Balin, his chief." Then he added an old office joke, and laughed more than ever:

"It would not even do to send them by water to inspect the Point-du-Four, for they would be sick on the penny steamboats on the Seine."

But she remained as serious as if she had not heard him, and then she said in a low voice, while she scratched her chin:

"If only we had a deputy to fall back upon. When the Chamber hears everything that is going on at the Admiralty, the minister will be turned out—"

She was interrupted by a terrible noise on the stairs. Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, who had just come in from the gutter, were giving each other slaps all the way upstairs. Their mother rushed at them furiously, and taking each of them by an arm, she dragged them into the room, shaking them vigorously. But as soon as they saw their father, they rushed up to him. He kissed them affectionately, and taking one of them on each knee, he began to talk to them.

Philippe-Auguste was an ugly, ill-kempt little brat, dirty from head to foot, with the face of an idiot, and Marie-Louise was already like her mother—spoke like her, repeated her words, and even imitated her movements. She also asked him whether there was anything fresh at the office, and he replied merrily:

"Your friend, Ramon, who comes and dines here every Sunday, is going to leave us, little one. There is a new senior head-clerk."

She looked at her father, and with a precocious child's pity, she said:

"So somebody has been put over your head again!"

He stopped laughing and did not reply. Then, in order to create a diversion, he said, addressing his wife, who was cleaning the windows:

"How is mamma, up there?"

Madame Caravan left off rubbing, turned round, pulled her cap up, as it had fallen quite on to her back, and said, with trembling lips:

"Ah! yes; just speak to your mother about this, for she has created a pretty scene. Just think that a short time ago Madame Lebaudin, the hairdresser's wife, came upstairs to borrow a packet of starch of me, and, as I was not at home, your mother called her *a beggar woman,* and turned her out; but I gave it to the old woman. She pretended not to hear, like she always does when one tells her unpleasant truths, but she is no more deaf than I am, as you know. It is all a sham, and the proof of it is, that she went up to her own room immediately without saying a word."

Caravan did not utter a word, and at that moment the little servant came in to announce dinner. In order to let his mother know, he took a broom-handle, which always stood in a corner, and rapped loudly on the ceiling three times, and then they went into the dining-room. Madame Caravan, junior, helped the soup, and waited for the old woman. But she did not come, and the soup was getting cold, so they began to eat slowly, and when their plates were empty, they waited again. Then Madame Caravan, who was furious, attacked her husband:

"She does it on purpose, you know that as well as I do. But you always uphold her."

In great perplexity between the two, he sent up Marie-Louise to fetch her grandmother, and sat motionless, with his eyes down, while his wife tapped her glass angrily with her knife. In about a minute

the door flew open suddenly, and the child came in again, out of breath, and very pale, and said quickly:

"Grandmamma has fallen down on the ground."

Caravan jumped up, threw his table-napkin down, and rushed upstairs, while his wife, who thought it was some trick of her mother-in-law, followed more slowly, shrugging her shoulders, as if to express her doubt. When they got upstairs, however, they found the old woman lying at full length in the middle of the room, and when they turned her over they saw that she was insensible and motionless. Her skin looked more wrinkled and yellow than usual, her eyes were closed, her teeth clenched, and her thin body was stiff.

Caravan kneeled down by her and began to moan:

"My poor mother! my poor mother!" he said. But the other Madame Caravan said:

"Bah! She has only fainted again, that is all, and she has done it to prevent us from dining comfortably, you may be sure of that."

They put her on the bed, undressed her completely, and Caravan, his wife, and the servant began to rub her, but, in spite of their efforts, she did not recover consciousness, so they sent Rosalie, the servant, to fetch "Doctor" Chenet. He lived a long way off, on the quay going toward Suresnes, and so it was a considerable time before he arrived. He came at last, however, and, after having looked at the old woman, felt her pulse, and auscultated her, he said: "It is all over."

Caravan threw himself on the body, sobbing violently. He kissed his mother's rigid face, and wept

so that great tears fell on the dead woman's face, like drops of water. Naturally, Madame Caravan, junior, showed a decorous amount of grief, uttered feeble moans as she stood behind her husband, and she rubbed her eyes vigorously.

But, suddenly, Caravan raised himself up, with his thin hair in disorder, and, looking very ugly in his grief, said:

"But, are you sure, doctor? Are you quite sure?"

The medical man stooped over the body, and, handling it with professional dexterity, as a shopkeeper might do, when showing off his goods, he said: "See, my dear friend, look at her eye."

He raised the eyelid and the old woman's look reappeared under his finger, altogether unaltered, unless, perhaps, the pupil was rather larger, and Caravan felt a severe shock at the sight. Then Monsieur Chenet took her thin arm, forced the fingers open, and said, angrily, as if he had been contradicted:

"Just look at her hand; I never make a mistake, you may be quite sure of that."

Caravan fell on the bed, and almost bellowed, while his wife, still whimpering, did what was necessary.

She brought the night-table, on which she spread a table-napkin. Then she placed four wax candles on it, which she lighted; then took a sprig of box, which was hanging over the chimney glass, and put it between the candles, into the plate, which she filled with clean water, as she had no holy water. After a moment's rapid reflection, she threw a pinch of salt into the water, no doubt thinking she was performing some sort of act of consecration by doing

that. When she had finished, she remained standing motionless, and the medical man, who had been helping her, whispered to her:

"We must take Caravan away."

She nodded assent, and, going up to her husband, who was still on his knees, sobbing, she raised him up by one arm, while Chenet took him by the other.

They put him into a chair, and his wife kissed his forehead and then began to lecture him. Chenet enforced her words, and preached firmness, courage, and resignation—the very things which are always wanting in such overwhelming misfortunes—and then both of them took him by the arms again and led him out.

He was crying like a big child, with convulsive sobs; his arms were hanging down and his legs seemed useless; he went downstairs without knowing what he was doing, and moved his legs mechanically. They put him into the chair which he always occupied at dinner, in front of his empty soup-plate. And there he sat, without moving, with his eyes fixed on his glass, so stupefied with grief that he could not even think.

In a corner, Madame Caravan was talking with the doctor, and asking what the necessary formalities were, as she wanted to obtain practical information. At last, Monsieur Chenet, who appeared to be waiting for something, took up his hat and prepared to go, saying that he had not dined yet; whereupon, she exclaimed:

"What! you have not dined? But stop here, doctor; don't go. You shall have whatever we can give you, for, of course, you will understand that we do

not fare sumptuously." However, he made excuses and refused, but she persisted, and said:

"You really must stop; at times like this people like to have friends near them, and, besides that, perhaps you will be able to persuade my husband to take some nourishment; he must keep up his strength."

The doctor bowed, and, putting down his hat, said:

"In that case, I will accept your invitation, Madame."

She gave Rosalie, who seemed to have lost her head, some orders, and then sat down, "to pretend to eat," as she said, "to keep the 'doctor' company."

The soup was brought in again, and Monsieur Chenet took two helpings. Then there came a dish of tripe, which exhaled a smell of onions, and which Madame Caravan made up her mind to taste.

"It is excellent," the doctor said, at which she smiled, and, turning to her husband, she said:

"Do take a little, my poor Alfred, only just to get something into your stomach. Remember that you have got to pass the night watching by her!"

He held out his plate, docilely, just as he would have gone to bed if he had been told to, obeying her in everything without resistance and without reflection, and, therefore, he ate. The doctor helped himself three times, while Madame Caravan, from time to time, fished out a large piece at the end of her fork, and swallowed it with a sort of studied inattention.

When a salad bowl full of macaroni was brought in, the doctor said:

"By Jove! That is what I am very fond of." And this time Madame Caravan helped everybody. She even filled the children's saucers, which they had scraped clean, and who, being left to themselves, had been drinking wine without any water, and were now kicking each other under the table.

Chenet remembered that Rossini, the composer, had been very fond of that Italian dish, and suddenly he exclaimed:

"Why! that rhymes, and one could begin some lines like this:

"The Maestro Rossini
Was fond of macaroni."

Nobody listened to him, however. Madame Caravan, who had suddenly grown thoughtful, was thinking of all the probable consequences of the event, while her husband made bread pellets, which he put on the tablecloth, and looked at with a fixed, idiotic stare. As he was devoured by thirst, he was continually raising his glass to his lips, and the consequence was that his senses, already rather upset by the shock and grief, seemed to dance about vaguely in his head, as if they were going to vanish altogether.

Meanwhile, the doctor, who had been drinking away steadily, was getting visibly drunk, and Madame Caravan herself felt the reaction which follows all nervous shocks. She was agitated and excited, and although she had been drinking nothing but water, she felt her head rather confused.

By and by, Chenet began to relate stories of deaths, that appeared funny to him. In the suburbs of Paris, which are full of people from the prov-

inces, one meets with the indifference toward death, even of a father or a mother, which all peasants show; a want of respect, an unconscious callousness which is common in the country, and rare in Paris. Said he:

"Why, I was sent for last week to the Rue du Puteaux, and when I went, I found the sick person (and there was the whole family calmly sitting near the bed) finishing a bottle of liqueur of aniseed, which had been bought the night before to satisfy the dying man's fancy."

But Madame Caravan was not listening; she was continually thinking of the inheritance, and Caravan was incapable of understanding anything.

Soon Rosalie served coffee, which had been made very strong, and as every cup was well qualified with cognac, it made all their faces red, and confused their ideas still more. To make matters still worse, Chenet suddenly seized the brandy bottle and poured out "a drop just to wash their mouths out with," as he termed it, for each of them. Then, without speaking any more, overcome, in spite of themselves, by that feeling of animal comfort which alcohol affords after dinner, they slowly sipped the sweet cognac, which formed a yellowish syrup at the bottom of their cups.

The children had gone to sleep, and Rosalie carried them off to bed. Then, Caravan, mechanically obeying that wish to forget oneself which possesses all unhappy persons, helped himself to brandy again several times, and his dull eyes grew bright. At last the doctor rose to go, and seizing his friend's arm, he said:

"Come with me; a little fresh air will do you good. When you are in trouble, you must not stick to one spot."

The other obeyed mechanically, put on his hat, took his stick, and went out, and both of them went arm-in-arm toward the Seine, in the starlight night.

The air was warm and sweet, for all the gardens in the neighborhood are full of flowers at that season of the year, and their scent, which is scarcely perceptible during the day, seems to awaken at the approach of night, and mingles with the light breezes which blow upon them in the darkness.

The broad avenue, with its two rows of gas-lamps, which extend as far as the Arc de Triomphe, was deserted and silent, but there was the distant roar of Paris, which seemed to have a reddish vapor hanging over it. It was a kind of continual rumbling, which was at times answered by the whistle of a train at full speed, in the distance, traveling to the ocean through the provinces.

The fresh air on the faces of the two men rather overcame them at first, made the doctor lose his equilibrium a little, and increased Caravan's giddiness, from which he had suffered since dinner. He walked as if he were in a dream; his thoughts were paralyzed; although he felt no great grief, for he was in a state of mental torpor that prevented him from suffering, and he even felt a sense of relief which was increased by the mildness of the night.

When they reached the bridge, they turned to the right and faced the fresh breeze from the river, which rolled along, calm and melancholy, bordered by tall

poplar-trees. The stars looked as if they were floating on the water and were moving with the current. A slight, white mist that floated over the opposite banks filled their lungs with a sensation of cold, and Caravan stopped suddenly, for he was struck by that smell from the water, which brought back old memories to his mind. For suddenly, in his mind, he saw his mother again, in Picardy, as he had seen her years before, kneeling in front of their door and washing the heaps of linen, by her side, in the stream that ran through their garden. He almost fancied that he could hear the sound of the wooden beetle with which she beat the linen, in the calm silence of the country, and her voice, as she called out to him: "Alfred, bring me some soap." And he smelled the odor of the trickling water, of the mist rising from the wet ground, of the heap of wet linen which he should never forget, the less that it came back to him on the very evening on which his mother died.

He stopped, with a feeling of despair, feeling heartbroken at that eternal separation. His life seemed cut in half, all his youth gone, swallowed up by that death. All the *former* life was over and done with, all the recollections of his youthful days would vanish; for the future, there would be nobody to talk to him of what had happened in days gone by, of the people he had known of old, of his own part of the country, and of his past life; that was a part of his existence which existed no longer, and the other might as well end now.

And then he saw his mother as she was when younger, wearing well-worn dresses, which he re-

membered for such a long time that they seemed inseparable from her. He recollected her movements, the different tones of her voice, her habits, her manias, her fits of anger, the wrinkles on her face, the movements of her thin fingers, and all her well-known attitudes, which she would never have again, and clutching hold of the doctor, he began to moan and weep. His lank legs began to tremble, his whole stout body was shaken by his sobs, all he could say was:

"My mother, my poor mother, my poor mother!"

But his companion, who was still drunk, and who intended to finish the evening in certain places of bad repute that he frequented secretly, made him sit down on the grass by the riverside, and left him almost immediately, under the pretext that he had to see a patient.

Caravan went on crying for a long time, and then, when he had got to the end of his tears—when his grief had, so to speak, run out of him—he again felt relief, repose, and sudden tranquillity.

The moon had risen and bathed the horizon in its soft light. The tall poplar-trees had a silvery sheen on them, and the mist on the plain looked like floating snow. The river, in which the stars were reflected, and which looked as if it were covered with mother-of-pearl, was rippled by the wind. The air was soft and sweet, and Caravan inhaled it almost greedily, thinking that he could perceive a feeling of freshness, of calm and of superhuman consolation pervading him.

He really tried to resist that feeling of comfort and relief, and kept on saying to himself: "My mother,

my poor mother!" He tried to make himself cry, from a kind of conscientious feeling, but he could not succeed in doing so any longer, and the sad thoughts which had made him sob so bitterly a short time before had almost passed away. In a few moments he rose to go home, and returned slowly, under the influence of that serene night, with a heart soothed in spite of himself.

When he reached the bridge, he saw the last tram-car, ready to start, and the lights through the windows of the *Café du Globe,* and felt a longing to tell somebody of the catastrophe that had happened, to excite pity, to make himself interesting. He put on a woeful face, pushed open the door, and went up to the counter, where the landlord still was. He had counted on creating an effect, and had hoped that everybody would get up and come to him with outstretched hands, and say: "Why, what is the matter with you?" But nobody noticed his disconsolate face, so he rested his two elbows on the counter, and, burying his face in his hands, he murmured: "Good heavens! Good heavens!"

The landlord looked at him and said: "Are you ill, Monsieur Caravan?"

"No, my friend," he replied, "but my mother has just died."

"Ah!" the other exclaimed, and as a customer at the other end of the establishment asked for a glass of Bavarian beer, he went to attend to him, leaving Caravan almost stupefied at his want of sympathy.

The three domino players were sitting at the same table which they had occupied before dinner, totally absorbed in their game, and Caravan went up to

them, in search of pity, but as none of them appeared to notice him, he made up his mind to speak.

"A great misfortune has happened to me since I was here," he said.

All three raised their heads slightly at the same instant, but kept their eyes fixed on the pieces which they held in their hands.

"What do you say?"

"My mother has just died."

Whereupon one of them said: "Oh! the devil," with that false air of sorrow which indifferent people assume. Another, who could not find anything to say, emitted a sort of sympathetic whistle, shaking his head at the same time, and the third turned to the game again, as if he were saying to himself: "Is that all!"

Caravan had expected some of those expressions that are said to "come from the heart," and when he saw how his news was received he left the table, indignant at their calmness before a friend's sorrow, although at that moment he was so dazed with grief that he hardly felt it, and went home. When he got in, his wife was waiting for him in her nightgown, sitting in a low chair by the open window, still thinking of the inheritance.

"Undress yourself," she said; "we will talk when we are in bed."

He raised his head, and looking at the ceiling, he said:

"But there is nobody up there."

"I beg your pardon, Rosalie is with her, and you can go and take her place at three o'clock in the morning, when you have had some sleep."

He only partially undressed, however, so as to be ready for anything that might happen, and after tying a silk handkerchief round his head, he joined his wife, who had just got in between the sheets. For some time they remained side by side, and neither of them spoke. She was thinking.

Even in bed, her nightcap was adorned with a red bow, and was pushed rather over one ear, as was the way with all the caps that she wore. Presently, she turned toward him and said:

"Do you know whether your mother made a will?"

He hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

"I—I do not think so. No, I am sure that she did not."

His wife looked at him, and she said, in a low, furious voice:

"I call that infamous; here we have been wearing ourselves out for ten years in looking after her, and have boarded and lodged her! Your sister would not have done so much for her, nor I either, if I had known how I was to be rewarded! Yes, it is a disgrace to her memory! I daresay that you will tell me that she paid us, but one cannot pay one's children in ready money for what they do; that obligation is recognized after death; at any rate, that is how honorable people act. So I have had all my worry and trouble for nothing! Oh, that is nice! that is very nice!"

Poor Caravan, who felt nearly distracted, kept on saying:

"My dear, my dear, please, please be quiet."

She grew calmer by degrees, and, resuming her usual voice and manner, she continued:

"We must let your sister know to-morrow."

He started, and said:

"Of course we must; I had forgotten all about it; I will send her a telegram the first thing in the morning."

"No," she replied, like a woman who had foreseen everything; "no, do not send it before ten or eleven o'clock, so that we may have time to turn round before she comes. It does not take more than two hours to get here from Charenton, and we can say that you lost your head from grief. If we let her know in the course of the day that will be soon enough, and will give us time to look round."

But Caravan put his hand to his forehead, and, in the same timid voice in which he always spoke of his chief, the very thought of whom made him tremble, he said:

"I must let them know at the office."

"Why?" she replied. "On such occasions like this, it is always excusable to forget. Take my advice, and don't let him know; your chief will not be able to say anything to you, and you will put him into a nice fix."

"Oh! yes, I shall, indeed, and he will be in a terrible rage, too, when he notices my absence. Yes, you are right; it is a capital idea, and when I tell him that my mother is dead, he will be obliged to hold his tongue."

And he rubbed his hands in delight at the joke, when he thought of his chief's face; while the body of the dead old woman lay upstairs, and the servant was asleep close to it.

But Madame Caravan grew thoughtful, as if she were preoccupied by something which she did not care to mention. But at last she said:

"Your mother had given you her clock, had she not; the girl playing at cup and ball?"

He thought for a moment, and then replied:

"Yes, yes; she said to me a long time ago, when she first came here: 'I shall leave the clock to you, if you look after me well.'"

Madame Caravan was reassured, and regained her serenity, and said:

"Well, then, you must go and fetch it out of her room, for if we get your sister here, she will prevent us from having it."

He hesitated: "Do you think so?" That made her angry.

"I certainly think so; as soon as it is in our possession, she will know nothing at all about where it came from; it belongs to us. It is just the same with the chest of drawers with the marble top that is in her room; she gave it to me one day when she was in a good temper. We will bring it down at the same time."

Caravan, however, seemed incredulous, and said:

"But, my dear, it is a great responsibility!"

She turned on him furiously.

"Oh! Indeed! Will you never alter? You would let your children die of hunger, rather than make a move. Does not that chest of drawers belong to us, as she gave it to me? And if your sister is not satisfied, let her tell me so, me! I don't care a straw for your sister. Come, get up, and we will bring down what your mother gave us, immediately."

Trembling and vanquished, he got out of bed, and began to put on his trousers, but she stopped him:

"It is not worth while to dress yourself; your underclothes are quite enough; I mean to go as I am."

They both left the room in their nightclothes, went upstairs quite noiselessly, opened the door, and went into the room, where the four lighted tapers and the plate with the sprig of box alone seemed to be watching the old woman in her rigid repose; for Rosalie, who was lying back in the easy-chair with her legs stretched out, her hands folded in her lap, and her head on one side, was also quite motionless, and snoring with her mouth wide open.

Caravan took the clock, which was one of those grotesque objects that were produced so plentifully under the Empire. A girl in gilt bronze was holding a cup and ball, and the ball formed the pendulum.

"Give that to me," his wife said, "and take the marble top off the chest of drawers."

He put the marble on his shoulder with a considerable effort, and they left the room. Caravan had to stoop in the doorway, and trembled as he went downstairs, while his wife walked backward, so as to light him, holding the candlestick in one hand and the clock under her other arm.

When they were in their own room, she heaved a sigh.

"We have got over the worst part of the job," she said; "so now let us go and fetch the other things."

But the drawers were full of the old woman's wearing apparel which they must manage to hide somewhere, and Madame Caravan soon thought of a plan.

"Go and get that wooden box in the passage; it is hardly worth anything and we may just as well put it here."

And when he had brought it upstairs, the change began. One by one, she took out all the collars, cuffs, chemises, caps, all the well-worn things that had belonged to the poor woman lying there behind them, and arranged them methodically in the wooden box, in such a manner as to deceive Madame Braux, the deceased woman's other child, who would be coming the next day.

When they had finished, they first of all carried the drawers downstairs, and the remaining portion afterward, each of them holding an end. It was some time before they could make up their minds where it would stand best; but at last they settled upon their own room, opposite the bed, between the two windows. As soon as it was in its place, Madame Caravan filled it with her own things. The clock was placed on the chimney-piece in the dining-room. They looked to see what the effect was, and were both delighted with it, agreeing that nothing could be better. Then they got into bed, she blew out the candle, and soon everybody in the house was asleep.

It was broad daylight when Caravan opened his eyes again. His mind was rather confused when he woke up, and he did not clearly remember what had happened for a few minutes; when he did, he felt it

painfully, and jumped out of bed, almost ready to cry again.

He very soon went to the room overhead, where Rosalie was still sleeping in the same position as the night before, for she did not wake up once during the whole time. He sent her to do her work, put fresh tapers in the place of those that had burned out, and then he looked at his mother, revolving in his brain those apparently profound thoughts, those religious and philosophical commonplaces, which trouble people of mediocre minds in the face of death.

But he went downstairs as soon as his wife called him. She had written out a list of what had to be done during the morning, which rather frightened him when he saw it.

1. Give information of the death to the mayor's officer.
2. See the doctor who had attended her.
3. Order the coffin.
4. Give notice at the church.
5. Go to the undertaker.
6. Order the notices of her death at the printer's.
7. Go to the lawyer.
8. Telegraph the news to all the family.

Besides all this, there were a number of small commissions; so he took his hat and went out. As the news had got abroad, Madame Caravan's female friends and neighbors soon began to come in, and begged to be allowed to see the body. There had been a scene at the hairdresser's, on the ground floor, about the matter, between husband and wife, while he was shaving a customer. While busily knitting

the woman had said: "Well, there is one less, and one as great a miser as one ever meets with. I certainly was not very fond of her; but, nevertheless, I must go and have a look at her."

The husband, while lathering his customer's chin, said:

"That is another queer fancy! Nobody but a woman would think of such a thing. It is not enough for them to worry you during life, but they cannot even leave you at peace when you are dead."

But his wife, not put out in the least, replied: "The feeling is stronger than I, and I must go. It has been on me since the morning. If I were not to see her, I should think about it all my life, but when I have had a good look at her, I shall be satisfied."

The knight of the razor shrugged his shoulders, and remarked in a low voice to the gentleman whose cheek he was scraping:

"Now, what sort of ideas do you think these confounded females have? I should not amuse myself by inspecting a corpse!"

But his wife heard him, and replied very quietly:

"But I do, I do." And then, putting her knitting down on the counter, she went upstairs, to the first floor, where she met two other neighbors. These had just come, and were discussing the event with Madame Caravan, who was giving them the details. Then the four went together to the mortuary chamber. The women went in softly, and, one after the other, sprinkled the bedclothes with the water, kneeled down, made the sign of the cross while they mumbled a prayer, then got up, and, open-mouthed, regarded the corpse for a long time, while the daughter-in-law

of the dead woman, with her handkerchief to her face, pretended to be sobbing piteously.

When she turned to walk away, whom should she perceive standing close to the door but Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, who were curiously taking stock of things. Then, forgetting to control her temper, she threw herself upon them with uplifted hands, crying out in a furious voice: "Will you get out of this, you brats."

Ten minutes later, going upstairs again with another contingent of neighbors, she prayed, wept profusely, performed all her duties, and again caught the children following her upstairs. She boxed their ears soundly, but the next time she paid no heed to them, and at each fresh influx of visitors the two urchins followed in the wake, crowded themselves up in a corner, slavishly imitating everything they saw their mother do.

When afternoon came round the crowds of curious people began to diminish, and soon there were no more visitors. Madame Caravan, returning to her own apartments, began to make the necessary preparations for the funeral ceremony, and the defunct was left by herself.

The window of the room was open. A torrid heat entered along with clouds of dust; the flames of the four candles were flickering in the direction of the corpse, and upon the cloth which covered the face, the closed eyes, the two hands stretched out, small flies alighted, came, went, and buzzed up and down incessantly, being the only companions of the old woman during the next hour.

Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste, however, had

now left the house, and were running up and down the street. They were soon surrounded by their playmates, and by little girls, especially, who were older, and who were interested in the mysteries of life, and asked questions in the manner of persons of great importance.

"Then your grandmother is dead?"

"Yes, she died yesterday evening."

"How, in what way did she meet her death?"

Then Marie began to explain, telling all about the candles and the cadaverous face. It was not long before great curiosity was aroused in the breasts of all the children, and they asked to be allowed to go upstairs to look at the departed.

Then Marie-Louise arranged a party for the first visit, consisting of five girls and two boys—the biggest and the most courageous. She made them take off their shoes so that they might not be discovered. The troop filed into the house and mounted the stairs as stealthily as an army of mice.

Once in the chamber, the little girl, imitating her mother, regulated the ceremony. She solemnly walked in advance of her comrades, went down on her knees, made the sign of the cross, moistened the lips of the corpse with a few drops of water, stood up again, sprinkled the bed, and while the children all crowded together were approaching—frightened and curious, and eager to look at the face and hands of the deceased—she began suddenly to simulate sobbing, and to bury her eyes in her little handkerchief. Then, instantly consoled on thinking of the other children who were downstairs waiting at the door, she withdrew in haste, returning in a minute with

another group, and then a third; for all the little ruffians of the neighborhood, even to the little beggars in rags, had congregated in order to participate in this new pleasure. Each time she repeated her mother's grimaces with absolute perfection.

At length, however, she tired of it. Some game or another attracted the children away from the house, and the old grandmother was left alone, forgotten suddenly by everybody.

A dismal gloom pervaded the chamber, and upon the dry and rigid features of the corpse the dying flames of the candles cast occasional gleams of light.

Toward eight o'clock, Caravan ascended to the chamber of death, closed the windows, and renewed the candles. On entering now he was quite composed, evidently accustomed to regard the corpse as though it had been there for a month. He even went the length of declaring that, as yet, there were no signs of decomposition, making this remark just at the moment when he and his wife were about to sit down at table. "Pshaw!" she responded, "she is now in wood; she will keep there for a year."

The soup was eaten without a word being uttered by anyone. The children, who had been free all day, were now worn out by fatigue and were sleeping soundly in their chairs, and nobody ventured to break the silence.

Suddenly the flame of the lamp went down. Mme. Caravan immediately turned up the wick, a prolonged, gurgling noise ensued, and the light went out. She had forgotten to buy oil during the day. To send for it now to the grocer's would keep back

the dinner, and everybody began to look for candles. But none were to be found except the night lights which had been placed upon the table upstairs, in the death-chamber.

Mme. Caravan, always prompt in her decisions, quickly dispatched Marie-Louise to fetch two, and her return was awaited in total darkness.

The footsteps of the girl who had ascended the stairs were distinctly heard. Then followed silence for a few seconds, and then the child descended precipitately. She threw open the door affrighted, and in a choked voice murmured: "Oh! papa, grandmamma is dressing herself!"

Caravan bounded to his feet with such precipitation that his chair rolled over against another chair. He stammered out: "You say? What do you say?"

But Marie-Louise, gasping with emotion, repeated: "Grand—grand—grandmamma is putting on her clothes, and is coming downstairs."

Caravan rushed boldly up the staircase, followed by his wife, dumfounded; but he came to a standstill before the door of the room, overcome with terror, not daring to enter. What was he going to see? Mme. Caravan, more courageous, turned the handle of the door and stepped forward into the room.

The room seemed to be darker, and in the middle of it, a tall emaciated figure moved about. The old woman stood upright, and in awakening from her lethargic sleep, before even full consciousness had returned to her, in turning upon her side and raising herself on her elbow, she had extinguished three of the candles which burned near the mortuary bed. Then,

recovering her strength, she got out of bed and began to seek for her things. The absence of her chest of drawers had at first given her some trouble, but, after a little, she had succeeded in finding her things at the bottom of the wooden trunk, and was now quietly dressing. She emptied the dishful of salted water, replaced the box which contained the latter behind the looking-glass, arranged the chairs in their places, and was ready to go downstairs when her son and daughter-in-law appeared.

Caravan rushed forward, seized her by the hands, and embraced her with tears in his eyes, while his wife, who was behind him, repeated in a hypocritical tone of voice: "Oh, what a blessing! Oh, what a blessing!"

But the old woman, not at all moved, without even appearing to understand, as rigid as a statue, and with glazed eyes, simply asked: "Will dinner soon be ready?"

He stammered out, not knowing what he said:

"Oh, yes, mother, we have been waiting for you."

And with an alacrity unusual in him he took her arm, while Mme. Caravan the younger seized the candle and lighted them downstairs, walking backward in front of them, step by step, just as she had done the previous night, in front of her husband, when he was carrying the marble.

On reaching the first floor, she ran against people who were ascending. It was the Charenton family, Mme. Braux, followed by her husband.

The wife, tall and fleshy, opened wide her astonished eyes, ready to take flight. The husband, a

shoemaker and socialist, a little hairy man, the perfect image of a monkey, murmured, quite unconcerned: "Well, what next? Is she resurrected?"

As soon as Mme. Caravan recognized them, she made despairing signs to them; then speaking aloud, she said: "Mercy! How do you mean! Look there! What a happy surprise!"

But Mme. Braux, dumfounded, understood nothing. She responded in a low voice: "It was your dispatch which made us come; we believed it was all over."

Her husband, who was behind her, pinched her to make her keep silent. He added with a malignant laugh, which his thick beard concealed: "It was very kind of you to invite us here. We set out in post-haste"—a remark which showed clearly the hostility that for a long time had reigned between the households. Then, just as the old woman had arrived at the last steps, he pushed forward quickly and rubbed against her cheeks the hair which covered his face, bawling out in her ear, on account of her deafness: "How well you look, mother; sturdy as usual, hey!"

Mme. Braux, in her stupor at seeing the old woman whom they all believed to be dead, dared not even embrace her; and her enormous bulk blocked up the passage and hindered the others from advancing. The old woman, uneasy and suspicious, but without speaking, looked at everyone around her. Her little gray eyes, piercing and hard, fixed themselves now on the one and now on the other. So terrible were they in their expression that the children became frightened.

Caravan, to explain matters, said: "She has been somewhat ill, but she is better now — quite well, indeed, are you not, mother?"

Then the good woman, stopping in her walk, responded in a husky voice, as though it came from a distance: "It was catalepsy. I heard you all the while."

An embarrassing silence followed. They entered the dining-room, and in a few minutes sat down to an improvised dinner.

Only M. Braux had retained his self-possession; his gorilla features grinned wickedly, while he let fall some words of double meaning which painfully disconcerted everyone.

But the clock in the dining-room kept on ticking every second; and Rosalie, lost in astonishment, came in for Caravan, who darted a fierce glance at her as she placed his *serviette* before him. His brother-in-law even asked him whether it was not one of his days for reception, to which he stammered out, in answer: "No, I have only been executing a few commissions; nothing more."

Next, a packet was brought in, which he began to open sadly; from it dropped out unexpectedly a letter with black borders. Reddening up to the very eyes, Caravan picked up the letter hurriedly, and pushed it into his waistcoat pocket.

His mother had not seen it! She was looking intently at her clock, which stood on the mantelpiece, and the embarrassment increased in midst of a glacial silence. Turning her face toward her daughter, the old woman, from whose eyes flashed fierce malice, said:

"On Monday you must take me away from here, so that I can see your little girl. I want so much to see her."

Madame Braux, her features illuminated, exclaimed: "Yes, mother, that I will," while Mme. Caravan, the younger, became pale, and seemed to be enduring the most excruciating agony. The two men, however, gradually drifted into conversation, and soon became embroiled in a political discussion. Braux maintained the most revolutionary and communistic doctrines, gesticulating and throwing about his arms, his eyes gleaming like a bloodhound's.

"Property, sir," he said, "is a robbery perpetrated on the working classes; the land is the common property of every man; hereditary rights are an infamy and a disgrace." But, hereupon, he suddenly stopped, having all the appearance of a man who has just said something foolish; then, resuming, after a pause, he said in softer tones: "But, I can see quite well that this is not the proper moment to discuss such things."

The door was opened, and Doctor Chenet appeared. For a moment he seemed bewildered, but regaining his usual smirking expression of countenance, he jauntily approached the old woman, and said:

"Ah, ha! mamma, you are better to-day. Oh! I never had any doubt but you would come round again; in fact, I said to myself as I was mounting the staircase: 'I have an idea that I shall find the old woman on her feet once more.'" Then he tapped her gently on the back: "Ah! she is as solid as the Pont-Neuf, she will see us all out: you will see if she does not."

He sat down, accepted the coffee that was offered him, and soon began to join in the conversation of the two men, backing up Braux, for he himself had been mixed up in the Commune.

Now the old woman, feeling herself fatigued, wished to leave the room, at which Caravan rushed forward. She thereupon looked him in the eyes and said to him:

"You must carry my clock and chest of drawers upstairs again without a moment's delay."

"Yes, mamma," he replied, yawning; "yes, I will do so."

The old woman then took the arm of her daughter and withdrew from the room. The two Caravans remained rooted to the floor, silent, plunged in the deepest despair, while Braux rubbed his hands and sipped his coffee, gleefully.

Suddenly Mme. Caravan, consumed with rage, attacked him, exclaiming: "You are a thief, a footpad, a cur. I would spit in your face, if—I would—I—would—" She could find nothing further to say, suffocating as she was with rage, while Braux still sipped his coffee, with a smile.

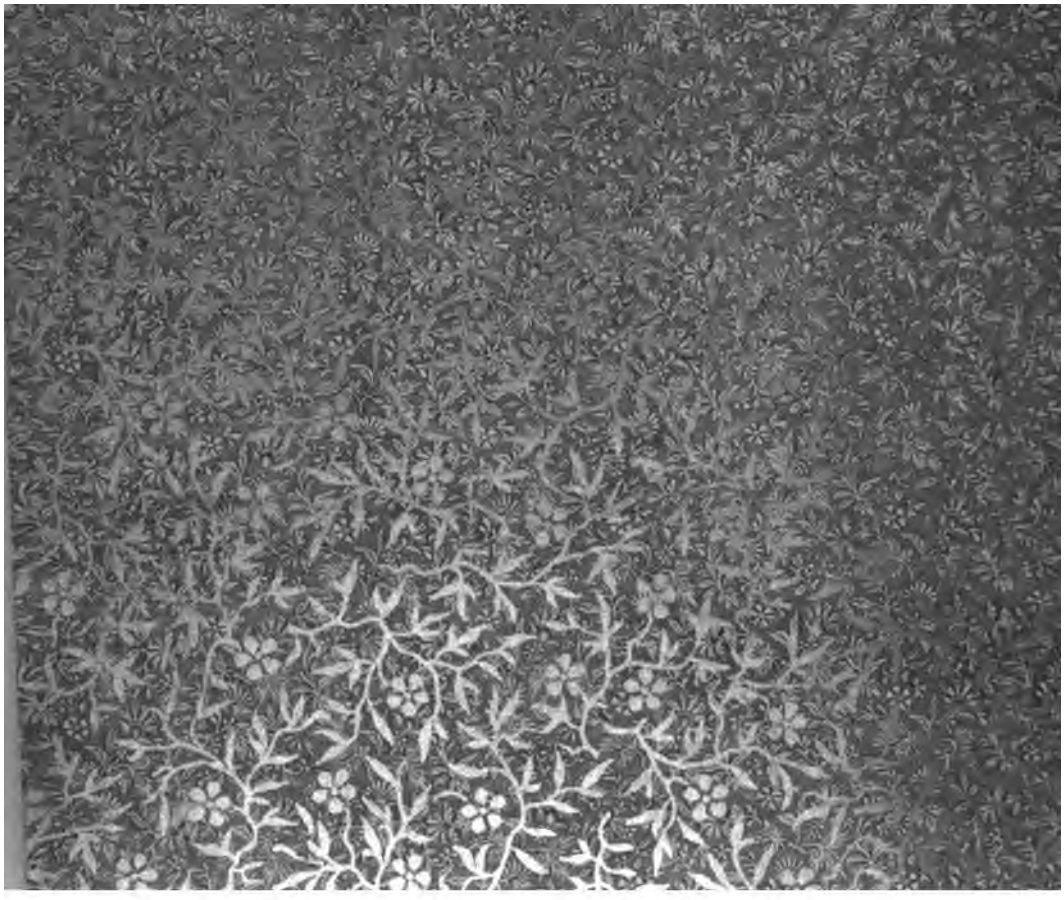
His wife, returning just then, looked menacingly at her sister-in-law, and both—the one with her enormous bulk, the other, epileptic and spare, voice changed, hands trembling—flew at one another and seized each other by the throat.

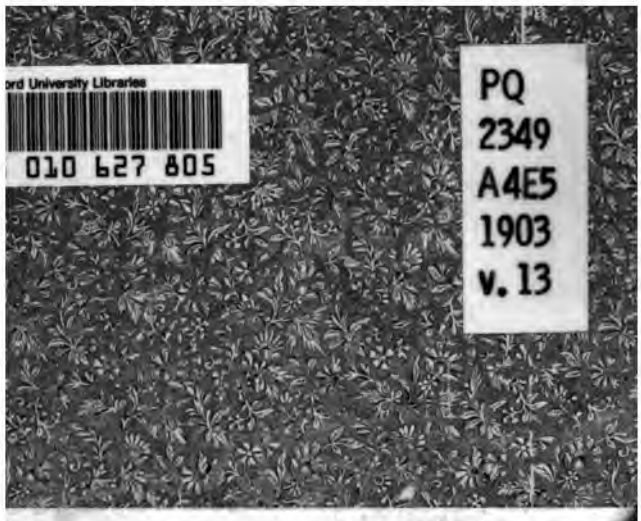
Chenet and Braux now interposed, and the latter, taking his better half by the shoulders, pushed her out of the door in front of him, shouting to his sister-in-law:

"Go away, you slut: you are a disgrace to your

relations." Then the two were heard in the street bellowing and shouting at the Caravans, until they had disappeared in the distance.

M. Chenet also took his departure, leaving the Caravans alone, face to face. The husband fell back in his chair, and with the cold sweat standing out in beads on his temples murmured: "What shall I say to my chief to-morrow?"





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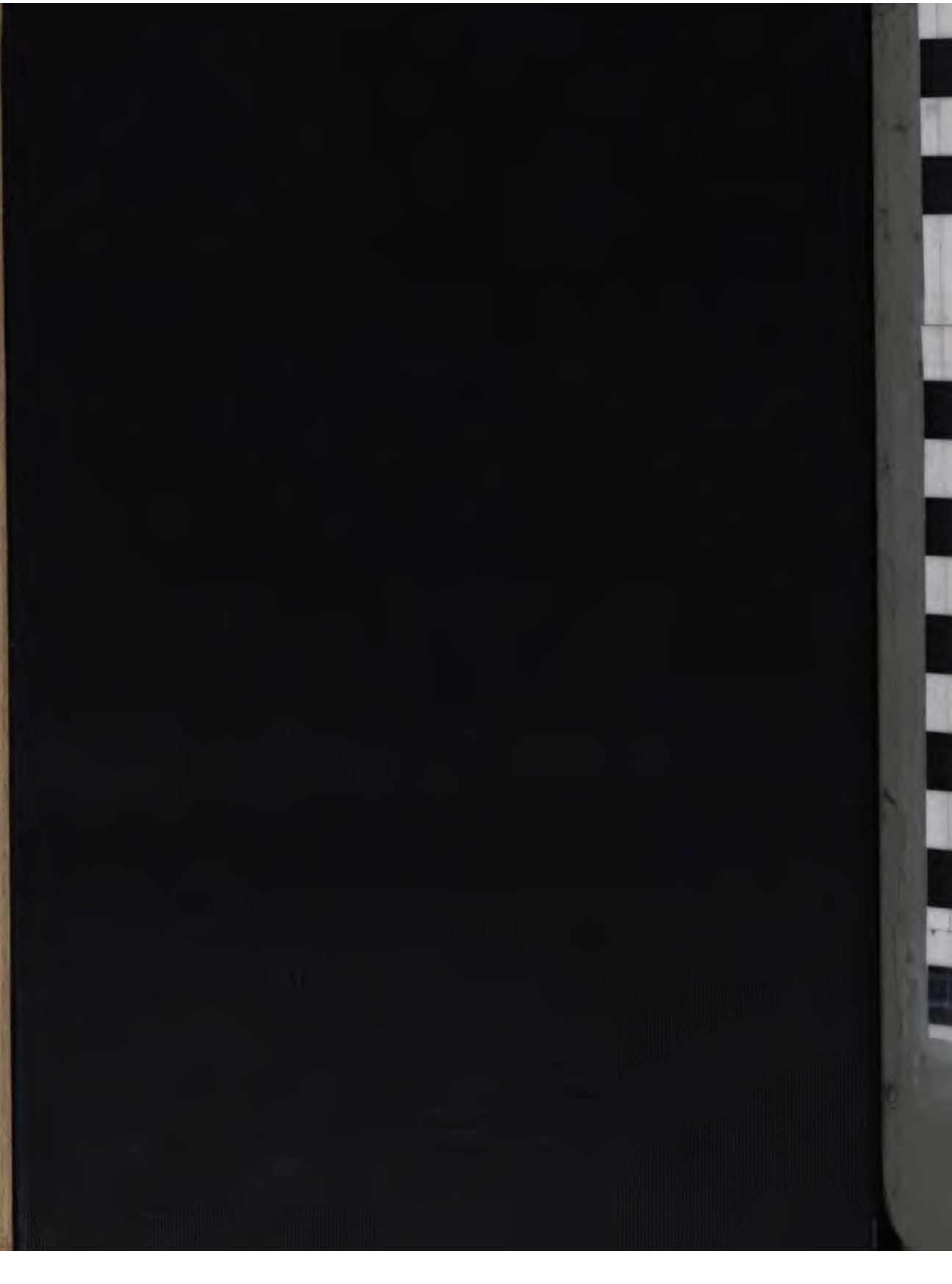
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